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BUFFALO BILL.

GOLD BULLET SPORT;

OR, THE KNIGHTS OF THE OVERLAND.

BY HON. WM. F. CODY (Buffalo Bill),
AUTHOR OF "DEATH TRAILER," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE DOUBLE TRAGEDY.

WINTER in the mountains! stern, cruel, relentless winter, with its icy breath sweeping over hill and valley, and its snowy mantle spreading over the wild and rugged landscape.

Up into the marvelously clear air a feathery column of smoke rose above the rough, yet comfortable cabin of some bold miner, who had come to that far-away scene to search for the golden ore, and toil for the glittering dross that rules the world.

A small cabin of two rooms, built of rough logs, and sheltered by an overhanging spur of the mountain, and half-hidden within a clump of pines, whose stout trunks had withstood the storms of two-score years, and whose needle-like foliage sighed softly in the summer breezes, or moaned dismally in the winter blasts.

Within the lonely hut sat two persons before a huge fire of logs—the one a man, the other a woman.

A man of superb physique, a dark-bearded face, handsome and resolute, and black hair that fell upon his shoulders—a man to love, yet a man to fear in anger.

He was dressed in top-boots, dark gray pants, and a blue woolen shirt, while around his waist was a belt containing two revolvers and a long knife.

A woman, and yet almost a child, for she was scarcely over eighteen, and notwithstanding her rude attire, strangely beautiful in face and form—a face to idolize, for in it dwelt so much of womanly loveliness and purity of soul.

She was dressed in a short woolen skirt, jacket of heavy material, and stout shoes—the latter failing to hide the symmetry of her little feet.

The inner room of the cabin, as seen through the open door, was used as a bedchamber, and held numerous pretensions to comfort for that far frontier land, and the apartment in which the two persons sat, dreamily gazing into the fire, was the sitting-room, kitchen and dining-room combined.

Upon one side of the fireplace were cooking utensils, and upon the other side a table, with shelves above it containing dishes. These, with three chairs, a large chest of stores, and a number of rifles, pistols and knives, completed the furnishing of the humble home, if I except a guitar, which lay across the woman's lap, its strings untouched and silent.

Who were these two, whose every appearance indicated that they belonged to the highest walks of life, living there in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado?

Was the man a fugitive from justice, and had he been forced to fly from civilization for crimes committed, and who had been followed by the woman of his love?

Was there guilt in their living there, far from the homes of their childhood, or had the curse of poverty driven the strong man to dig for gold, and the true love of woman caused her to follow his fortunes, to exile herself from the world to live with her heart's idol?

Let the sequel answer these queries, kind reader.

And as those two sat there in the firelight glow, the day wore on apace, and as the velvety shadows of night crept over the hillside and canyon, the pines sighed as though in deep sorrow, and the fleecy feathers of the flying moon-clouds fell silently down, covering over the gashes and gulches in the hills, and shutting out the rugged slopes from view.

Wearily up the steep hillside toiled a file of horsemen—their cloaks drawn close around them, their forms bent to face the icy gale, and their steeds climbing the mountains with no willing step, for their instinct told them that there was little comfort in those black hills for them.

The horsemen were five in number, and the one in the rear led a mated bearing a side-caddle.

The man in advance seemed of different metal from his followers—one, who in civilized life, would have been called a *gentleman*, if dress and appearance would make him such; his companions evidently were rough bordermen, with long unkempt hair and beard, rudely dressed, and wearing blanket coats or cloaks.

Gold Bullet Sport.

All were well mounted, armed to the teeth, and their very silence as they urged on their horses, seemed to forebode evil.

Up the snow-covered path they climbed, until suddenly the leader drew rein, and the others, per force of circumstances, followed his example.

Then, above the moaning of the pines, and the whistling of the winds, was heard a voice in that wild region.

It was a woman's voice, and raised in song—a voice that would have thrilled the hearts of a metropolitan audience, so clear, so surpassingly sweet was it in every note.

"Hark!"

The word broke sternly from the lips of the leading horseman, and all halted while the melody was wafted on the icy wind adown the snow-covered hillside.

"The bugles sung truce, when the night cloud had lowered,
And the sentinel stars set their watch in the sky;
And thousands had sunk on the ground overpowered—
The weary to sleep, and the wounded to die."

"Her voice! At last I am on the right trail! Sing on, sweet Victorine, for if you go not with me, that shall be your death-song. I vow it, before God!"

The words dropped in low, earnest tones from the set lips of the man, and he bent his head low and listened, while mingling with the woman's voice, were heard the low notes of a guitar.

A moment the horseman sat in silence, and then, with a muttered imprecation and a shake of his shoulders, he urged his steed on once more.

A few more lengths, and the animal gave a low neigh of joy; the rude mountain cabin was in full view before him.

And again the line of horsemen halted, while the heavy door of the log hut swung open and the miner stood on the threshold.

The dying rays of the setting sun at that moment broke through the snow-clouds and fell full upon his splendid form and lighted up his dark face—a face the very picture of ruined nobility—the face of a man who might have sinned, but had certainly suffered deeply, in the twenty-five or six years he had lived.

The wind came down, keen and raw from the heights above, whispering, sighing, sobbing and moaning, yet it brought no shiver to his stalwart frame, and his hair and beard tossed by the breeze, he stepped without the doorway.

Instantly he halted, his hands dropping instinctively upon the revolvers upon his hips, for his quick eyes caught sight of the horsemen, now halted within thirty paces of him.

"Who comes? Friends or foes?"

His voice rung out in a way that proved him willing to greet either friend or foe.

"I am your foe, Harold Meredith."

It was the leading horseman that spoke, and at an order in a low tone five rifles covered the miner.

But his face never paled, his voice never quivered, as he said in low, distinct tones:

"Yes, Clarence Gilmore, we are foes to the bitter end; but what do you wish here?"

"Your life, villain, and her whom you took from me."

"If you get either, Clarence Gilmore, it will not be a bloodless victory, I warn you."

"Oh, I know you well, Harold Meredith; but your threats avail you nothing, and my men have you covered with their rifles, and will shoot you in your tracks if you move. Suppose we come to terms, as I hold the trump card."

"What terms, Clarence Gilmore?"

"Your life if you give up Victorine."

"I will ask her. Victorine!"

"I am here, Harold."

The woman glided from the cabin out into the falling snow, and stood by the side of the miner.

"Victorine, yonder is Clarence Gilmore. He has come to take my life, and you from my protection—will you go?"

"Never!"

The woman spoke in a tone that admitted of no doubt of the sincerity of her determination.

"You have heard the answer, Clarence Gilmore; let it be war to the bitter end."

"Victorine, I demand that you forsake that man and come with me. For two years I have tracked you, and now I will not give you up," said Clarence Gilmore, and the glitter in his eyes proved that he was in deadly earnest.

"Before I would go with you, Clarence Gilmore, I will die by my own hand—nay, I will ask Harold Meredith to take my life."

A wild look came into the eyes of the miner, and his face turned to the hue of a corpse, as he said, in his deep tones:

"If I cannot protect you, Victorine, I will drive my knife to your heart."

The woman shuddered, and for an instant seemed about to fall; but recovering herself, she said, firmly:

"So be it, Harold; it were worse than a thousand deaths to go with him."

"Fire!"

The word broke savagely from the lips of Clarence Gilmore, and four rifles flashed out flame and echoed through the rocky hills, while Harold Meredith staggered back, hard hit, and

Victorine, with a wild shriek threw herself upon his breast.

With revolver in hand Clarence Gilmore dashed forward and drew rein within five paces of where the miner stood, the warm blood dropping from several wounds, upon the cold snow, one arm around the form of Victorine, the right hand holding his gleaming blade above her bosom.

"Back! If you come on, Clarence Gilmore, I will drive this knife through her heart!"

The horseman halted, his face pallid, and his eyes glaring, as he shouted:

"Howard Meredith, you dare not."

"Try me!"

Clarence Gilmore again spurred forward upon the two, and the knife descended, while the eyes of Victorine gazed straight into those bending above, and in which dwelt the look of a hunted tiger at bay.

"Good God forgive me!"

The words burst from between the set teeth, and the keen blade sunk deep into the bosom of the woman, from whose white lips broke one long, piercing cry of anguish.

Then the two sunk down upon the white couch of snow, the woman dying, the man sorely wounded.

Like a mad creature Clarence Gilmore flung himself from his steed and dropped down beside the woman, the miner unable to draw the revolver upon which his hand rested. His last strength had been given to the blow at the woman's heart.

"She is dead! God forever curse you, Harold Meredith!"

"Ay, and yet shall I have my revenge! Here, men, bring that lariat and string him up to yonder tree."

"He is dying, pard. Guess as how he's most gone now," said one of the rude men.

"Curse him! Were he dead, I would hang him. Up with him, I say!"

The men no longer hesitated. Around the neck the slip-noose was placed; the hands were bound, and the wounded man was dragged from the snow-clad earth into mid-air, and the rope made fast.

Grim and ghastly the form swayed to and fro in the icy wind, and adown the mountain-side came a wailing cry, such as a lost spirit might utter when crossing the threshold of Perdition.

It came to the ears of those five men, and four of them bounded away, sprung upon their tied horses, and rushed recklessly down the steep pathway, unheeding the cry of their leader to halt.

Then again came the wailing cry. It might be the wind in the pines, it might be the shriek of the panther; but Clarence Gilmore gave one glance at the hanging form of Harold Meredith, another at the dead woman, and fled from the scene, his horse urged madly on in the gathering gloom—flying from that death-haunted spot in the snow-clad hills.

CHAPTER II.

THE KNIGHTS OF THE OVERLAND.

THE stage station of Golden City, *en route* between Denver and Central City, Colorado, was astir to greet the expected noonday mail and express, and two-score miners in rude but picturesque costume, were discussing sundry cocktails and punches at Lem Flowers's popular bar, while awaiting the latest topics of news for discussion.

There was visible a certain excitement in the crowd, and Lem Flowers, who kept the station, certainly looked uneasy, as the hour of noon arrived and the stage was not heard rumbling through the valley.

"I tell yer, lads, I'm afraid Dan Smith has got inter trouble with Capt'in Satan, this trip," said an old miner, stepping out of the door and listening for the hoped-for sound of wheels.

"I guesses not, Luke Sanders, 'kase the stage hain't but half an hour late by my watch," said the long-legged man from Vermont.

"Your watch! oh, yas, you ought ter have plenty o' watches, for we all has a watch on yer when you is round heur, Hunky Dave," sneered Luke Sanders, and a rude laugh greeted his remark, while the man addressed, and who was known as Hunky Dave, dropped his hand upon his knife.

But the cry arose among the crowd that the stage was coming, and the next moment the coach and its six horses dashed in full sight, and rolled up to the door, a stranger seated upon the box holding the lines, instead of the well-known driver, Dan Smith.

Lem Flowers sprung forward and dragged open the door, for it was evident that there had been trouble, as the driver was without doubt a passenger who had volunteered to bring the coach into the station.

"Where is Dan Smith, the driver?" asked Lem Flowers, anxiously, of the man who had sprung from the stage box, and who was dressed in buckskin and moccasins, while his dark bearded face was shaded by a slouch hat.

"I heard as how Dan Smith was ter drive the reg'lar stage, pardner, an' he is comin' on ahind some miles—that is, ef ther whole capodulum hain't wiped out as we was nigh bein'."

"You were attacked by Captain Satan, then?" asked Lem Flowers, eagerly.

"Right, old hoss, you is. He war a devil, sartin. I tuk passage in ther durned ole box, an' I rid with Burt Boyd, the driver—"

"Where is Boyd?" asked Lem.

"Deader then a chicken with its head cut off, pard. He were made a pepper-box of, you bet, kase he thought be cu'd dash through the Overland Knights, as those devils call themselves; but they foched us up, you may gamble on, an' ef I've a durned cent left they don't know it, an' ther's two pilgrims in ther coach as were robbed, too."

During the explanation of the old hunter or trapper, for such he was, Lem Flowers had not noticed any one in the stage; but now he opened the door and beheld a small man, fat and round-faced, and as white as a ghost, seated upon the bottom of the coach trembling violently, and a slender female form leaning back upon the rear seat.

"I am sorry, sir, and miss, that you have been robbed, as I hear from this gentleman, but alight and come in to dinner."

The little man, seeing that all danger was over, obeyed with alacrity, and sprung from the stage, while Lem aided the lady passenger to alight—a slender, graceful form, well dressed in traveling costume, and a face, as seen through the thin vail, strangely beautiful and yet strangely sad—a face that caused every rough miner there to raise his hat politely at sight of it, a courtesy the maiden (for she was under twenty, and even looked younger) acknowledged with a bow, and a sweet smile that lighted up her pale face with sunshine.

"I see your father has already gone to the bar, miss; can I send you a glass of wine to steady your nerves?" asked Lem.

"That gentleman is not my father, sir—merely a fellow-passenger from Denver. Yes, I will thank you for a glass of wine, as I received a severe fright, and feel the need of it."

She spoke in the softest, sweetest voice, and ushering her into the best room in his house, the station-master hurried away to make his fair guest a whisky toddy, for Lem had allowed his politeness to overshoot the mark when he asked her to take a glass of wine, as whisky—and drank straight, too—was the beverage of his establishment.

Upon entering the bar, and while concocting the toddy, he learned from the rapid clatter of the fat old man, that the stage driven by Burt Boyd was an extra going to Central City to bring back a party to Denver, and that they had left some time in advance of the regular coach, of which Dan Smith was driver.

Not very far from Golden City they had suddenly been brought to a halt by a party of fifty masked men, who killed the driver, as he at tempted to drive through them, and robbed the three passengers.

"Stranger, I pass on all lies from this time hence forevermore, amen! You is the durnedest liar I ever hear blow. Pards, I have tol yer the truth," and the old hunter, with a look of contempt at his fat fellow-passenger, turned to the crowd and continued:

"He says ther were fifty gerloots. Thar wai but five o' them, an' they was five more then I wants ter see ag'in. Yas, they wore masks, as yer calls 'em, an' one of 'em was a boss, you bet, kase he sung out like a soldier on perrade ter throw up our han's."

"Mine went up, you bet, kase I only fights when thar's a chance o' victory; but thet durned gerloot squat down in ther coach an' yell'd bloody murder, while the pritty leetle gal jist said nothin' an' handed out her duckits when they was axed fur, 'ithout a word; but you jist shu'd seen thet rooster when Cap'n Satin, as yer calls him, took his gold-dust—you bet, it was like pullin' his jaw nut-crackers every time."

"I am ruined! I have not a dollar left," groaned the man of flesh.

"Again you is a liar, kase yer tol the leddy, an' I heerd yer, thet you had leetle dust with yer, but plenty in Denver; but, pard, how long afore I kin git some grub, kase I is allus hungry an' this 're little skirmidge has gi'n me a appetite as is onhe'lthy not to satisfy with wittles, you bet!"

"Dinner is ready now, sir, an', if you're willing to drive the stage on to Central City, we'll send down and bury poor Burt Boyd," said Lem Flowers.

"I'll roll ther ole box right on into Central City, you bet, kase I ust ter hold ther ribbons in ther ole Verginny mountains twenty years ago—I'm arter wittles now, but I suppose as how that thar gerloot as lied so, is like a b'ar, lives on his own fat."

In half an hour more the stage rolled away from Golden City—Buckskin Ben, hunter and trapper, holding the ribbons, and the maiden and the fat passenger again risking the danger of the road.

As the coach disappeared a dozen mounted men rode out of the station-yard, volunteers to go in search of Dan Smith and the regular stage, now an hour late, and which all were confident had also been halted by the daring band, known as Knights of the Overland, and who acknowledge for their chief a man whose

"Wondrous exploits, cruelty and daring escapes had won for him the name of Captain Satan."

"Thar she comes now!"

A dozen voices gave the cry, and a loud yell broke from the crowd as the regular stage came on at a swinging pace, Dan Smith, the well-known driver, holding the ribbons.

"Who-ho! All out for grub at Golden City!" shouted Dan, as he drew up and threw the reins upon the backs of the smoking wheel-horses.

"Hurrah for Dan! Boy, you came through all right, I'm glad to see," cried Lem Flowers, again stepping forward.

"We come through, yas, ole hoss, but that's cold meat within the precincts o' this coach—two stiffs, and two wounded."

The reply of the driver caused the crowd to gather around the coach, out of which there sprung a man of commanding presence—a man an inch over six feet, broad-shouldered, with a slender waist, and remarkably small hands and feet.

He was evidently under thirty, and his face was bronzed and beardless, while every feature was strongly marked with resolution and fearlessness, and in his large black eyes dwelt a look as though they rested constantly upon some scene of sorrow.

He was dressed in a jacket of the finest black silk velvet, and white corduroy pants, stuck in boots that were of the finest manufacture, and the heels of which were ornamented with handsome gold spurs.

A broad-brimmed white slouch hat sheltered his head, and upon his shoulders fell waving masses of soft brown hair, while, contrary to the custom in that wild region, he wore a white shirt, the bosom, collar and cuffs beautifully embroidered.

Around his waist was a belt of gold links containing two revolvers and a knife, all gold-mounted heavily, and in his hand he carried a whip, with the handle of the same precious metal, in the end of which glittered a large diamond.

When this exquisite horseman, without a horse, sprung from the coach, many a miner gave a grunt of contempt at his appearance, though he could but admit him to be a handsome man, with a form of splendid physical development.

With a bow to Lem Flowers, the stranger turned and aided to alight a young girl closely veiled, and then an elderly gentleman, who wore a blood-stained handkerchief around his head.

Then followed a rough-looking miner, also wounded, and as they were ushered into the station by Lem, Dan Smith drew from the coach two dead bodies—one an Irish miner, well known in Central City, the other a Jew peddler.

"Here's the stiffs, pards, an' ther ole man an' ther gold-digger you see enter the shanty is both wounded. I tell you we had it while it lasted," said Dan, adjourning to the bar.

"Who is the old gent, Dan?" asked a miner.

"He are a rich feller from the States as is bought the Grizzly mine, an' ther gal is his darter, who is goin' with him ter live in Central City."

"An' ther fancy gerloot, Dan, who are he?"

"He are a man, fellers, from the tip o' his toe to ther top o' his head, you kin gamble on, an' ef any feller as hears me talk goes for ter doubt my word, why, jist let him tackle that game-cock, an' he'll find it suddint death."

"He don't look it, Dan; he are too fine."

"Yas, fine feathers makes fine birds, an' his hain't ruffled, tho' he has jist laid six gerloots stone dead."

With cries of surprise the crowd gathered closer, and Dan, as is usual with those who have important news to communicate, very calmly delayed its recital, while he quietly poured out "five fingers" of whisky straight into a glass, and then dashed it off with a smack of relish.

"Durned ef I b'lieved half hour sin', that I'd ever wrestle with any tanglefoot any more, an' ef it hadn't been fer ther game-cock in spurs I'm durned ef I ever would."

"Tell us about it, Dan, and don't keep us in suspense," said the bartender.

"I guesses as how we was hel' in suspense for some minutes, an' it's but fair you is ter be too, seein' as how you is in no danger of yer lives, an' we was; but, fellers, that was blazes ter pay back in ther canyon, you may gamble on."

"Yer see, that was an extra sent on ahead with Burt Boyd, holding ther ribbons, an' when the Knights tackled him he was fool enough to want ter run through, an' they jist gi'n him lead pills, an' o' thet disease he died, while ther Knights jist bounced ther passengers fer all they was worth."

"Now ther comp'ny pay me fer drivin' ther old hearse, yonder, an' not fer fightin'; so when I comes upon ther Knights—and they's gittin' awful bad o' late—why, I jist draws rein, an' waits the result o' ther funeral."

"Waal, we come to ther canyon, an' mighty dint ther war three Knights rid inter ther road in front o' us, an' two ahind, an' ther lead'er, Captain Satan, yelled out:

"Throw 'em hands!"

"Now on ther box with me was that cold meat yonder, Irish Mike, an' he begun palaverin' with:

"How ther devil kin I throw up my han's up whin I was afther 'atin' pig's fate fer brik-fust?"

"I tell yer, fellers, Captain Satan, jist took a squint along his revolver an' Irish Mike throwed up ther sponge, fer his checks was called for mighty sudent, an' he tumbled over, a dead horses, you bet."

"Waal, my hands was up, as high as I c'u'd reach, an' Captain Satan called out, angry like:

"Dan Smith, tell the men in that hearse to git out an' lay flat down on ther ground."

"I gi'n ther text as 'twas preached ter me, an' durned ef I didn't hear one feller inside sayin' as how he was goin' ter fight it out, an' I whispered back as how he'd better not; but Lord bless us, pards, ther hearse-door swung open an' out jumps ther game-cock as is now in ther house, an' he had his shootin'-irons in his claws, too."

"Waal, you should a' heerd Captain Satan yell at him, an' they rode for'ard, while ther captain gi'n a loud toot on a horn he had slung to his neck."

"Now I 'specter ter see the youth in ther velvit jacket took right in outer ther wet; but I was mistook, you can gamble on, fer ef he didn't shove out those gold pistols o' his, an' they begin a awful tune fer the edification o' ther Knights. He shoted three times, an' three Knights went down, each one hit squar' in ther forehead, as I seen plainly, an' Captain Satan an' his remainin' pard hunted cover durned quick."

"But, jist then, up come half-a-dozen more Knights, as had heard ther horn toot, an' ther game-cock he yells ter me:

"Drive on, an' perfect yerself with ther dead Irish."

"But I didn't conclude ter drive on, an' durned ef Gold Spurs didn't jump clean up alongside o' me, with one jump that made me think he'd b'long'd to a circuss in his time, an' what I then beer'd was music at ther moaner's bench. He said:

"Drive on, or I'll kill yer!"

"Now his pistol was p'intin' at my head, an' I drove on, you bet, while he jist tossed Irish over me to perfect me, and standin' up on ther top o' ther hearse, he jist let fly three more shots as ther Knights ran afore us ter head us off, an' durned ef every shot didn't find whar them Knights lived, fer they tumbled off thar horses, hit in ther forehead, as the'r pards had been."

"Bully fer ther game-cock in velvet! But did he get Captain Satan?" asked several voices.

"No, he didn't draw trigger on that gent; ef he had, he'd made cold meat o' him; but in spite o' ther shootin', ther gold-spur sport put her through, an' he wasn't teched, as ye see fer yerselves, while Irish got three balls in him as was 'tended fer me, an' ther Jew was sent to Jerusalem, an' ther old gent, ther miner from Central City was also hurt; but we druv right on, passin' poor Burt Boyd lyin' dead on ther roadside, an' them Knights didn't foller us, you bet; they'd been sickened by ther fun."

"I tell yer, pards, thet game-cock are chained lightnin' let loose in a rumpus, an' when he loaded his weepins arter leavin' ther canyon, why, he jist put gold bullets inter them!"

"Gold bullets?" cried a score of voices.

"It are true, pards; he loaded them weepins with gold bullets, an' then he jist slid Irish inside, kase he was ridin' oneasy on top the hearse, seein' as how he c'u'dn't hold on; an' when we was in no danger, he slides inside his self, an' dresses ther wounds o' ther pilgrims as was hit, jist like he was a quack-doctor—but heur he are now," and Dan dropped his voice as the object of his conversation entered the bar.

"Come, driver, join me in a drink; and perhaps your friends will take something, too," said the stranger, pleasantly, and all present ranged themselves alongside the bar.

"Pards," said Dan Smith, as they stood with glasses in hand. "I don't know the name o' this gent, this whole team an' a hoss ter let, any more than I does ther handles you all answers to, but I'm goin' ter interdoose him ter yer by a name I thinks he deserves—pards, this heur gent who jist axed yer ter p'isen yerselves is my friend, Dead Shot, ther Gold Bullit Sport, an' yer gamble yer last cent he are a squar' man, every time."

A yell broke from the crowd of miners, and with a bow of thanks the stranger, just baptized as Dead Shot, the Gold Bullet Sport, turned and left the bar, and shortly after the stage rolled away with him seated on the box by the side of Dan Smith, and cheer after cheer followed the departing stage, for the handsome and unknown man had won the hearts of every one in Golden City.

CHAPTER III.

A STARTLING RECOGNITION.

THE little mining town of Central City lay in deep quiet under the afternoon sun, for the gold-diggers were hard at work in their "claims," and it was only at nightfall that the

place awakened from its sleep, for then the order was reversed, and when darkness rested on the valley, the laugh and song were heard, and under the sunlight all seemed in repose.

Upon a shelf of rock, far up the mountain side, stood a man attired in miner's dress—a man whose pinched face denoted suffering, and whose "naturally strong, elegant frame was bending in weakness.

Behind him a few paces was a hovel, rather than a cabin, for it was rudely thrown together, and the open door showed that its only comfort was a huge fire-place, for it held as furniture only a stool, a bed of tattered blankets and bear-skins, and several cooking utensils.

In one corner was a rifle, and hanging across the muzzle was a belt containing a revolver and knife, while upon the ground lay a pick, shovel and hatchet.

A moment the miner stood in silence gazing down upon the distant town, through the principal, and almost only, street of which was indistinctly visible the stage coach rolling toward the hotel.

"I will go and see if there is a reply to my letter; if not, I fear I shall die of starvation, for it has been two days since I tasted food, and a long time since I have enjoyed a good meal.

"Well, so be it, if I die here. I was a fool to attempt to live without one hope in life.

"Yes, I will die here in this wild land, and a rude grave will be my tomb, while she will revel in the wealth that was mine, and be happy with the love of another. Oh, God!"

He raised his hands and clasped them above his head, while his lips moved; but whether in prayer or imprecation it were hard to tell.

Entering the cabin, he took up his rifle, belted on his arms, and locking the door after him, slowly wended his way down the mountain side.

The sun set long ere he reached the town, and he found that there was some unusual excitement among the citizens as he entered the Central City House, the principal hotel in the place.

"What is it, partner?" he asked, of a miner who stood near.

"The devil's bin ter pay, boss, an' Capt'in Satan is the king-pin." He jist sailed inter the reg'lar coach an' a extra hearse as come over ther rode, an' robbed ther passengers; but he was brought up with a round turn by one cock o' ther prize-ring, as they call Dead Shot, who jist made cold meat o' six o' ther Knights o' ther Overland, an' waltzed ther stage right inter town."

"Were there many passengers?"

"The extra hearse had three, an' ther driver, Burt Boyd was kilt, an' ther reg'lar had six, two of whom passed in the'r checks, an' two more was wounded; but one of them as was robbed is jist ther prettiest gal I ever see, an' bein' as she's a stage-actor, she's goin' ter sing fer us this night of our Lord, Anny Dominecker, right 'round in ther Langrish Theater; so just waltz right in an' harken unto her chin music, an' lay out yer pile fer her benefit, as ther fellers is comin' down heavy in dust, seein' as how they feels sorry for her."

"I wish I could help her, but I am starving myself, and the miner turned sadly away.

"Hullo, Lambert, I've wanted ter see yer ever sin' I comed back. Wish ter pay yer the eagle yer loaned me when I left for Denver."

Hugh Lambert turned quickly, and beheld a young miner whom he had often seen before and whom he had befriended some months before upon his leaving town to collect some funds due him in Denver, and who was the same young man that had been a passenger in Dan Smith's stage that afternoon, and, in the attack of the Overland Knights, had received a slight wound in the arm.

"I am glad to see you, Morse, and the money comes in well, thank you; but when did you arrive?"

"This afternoon, an' ther was a lively circus on ther way, you bet, kase we jist run inter Captain Satan an' his band o' Knights, an' ef it hadn't been fer a young man as knows how to handle hisself, we'd jist been cold meat all of us; but I'm goin' down to ther theater to hear a gal sing: come long."

"Not now, Morse, for I must buy some provisions before the groceries close up for the night; but I will see you later," and Hugh Lambert, clutching close the money he had received, wended his way to the post-office and grocery comin'.

Yes, there was a letter for him, and he recognized the writing of the friend to whom he had written for a loan in his distress, and eagerly he opened the envelope; but his face turned a shade paler as he read the contents—regrets at inability to comply.

"I fear I am doomed to die here, for, dig as I may, no gold will turn up for my pick. Oh, God! how different was it a few years ago! and how different the life she now leads!"

For a moment he stood in silence, and then, with an effort recovering himself, made his purchases of groceries and ammunition, throwing the gold-piece upon the counter and walking out with his bundles.

A short walk brought him in front of Langrish's Theater, now lighted up, and before

Gold Bullet Sport.

which was a crowd of excited miners, calling upon all to

"Enter this hear slab shanty o' a theater, an' open yer ears ter hear a angel sing."

Mechanically he entered, and as he did so the curtain arose and a woman appeared upon the stage.

It was the same fair passenger who had been robbed by the Knights of the Overland—the same sadly beautiful face and graceful form, now clad in snowy white.

"Oh, God!"

The cry broke from the lips of Hugh Lambert, and he tottered back against the wall for support, while his eyes stared wildly at the fair face and form before him.

"No, it cannot be! It is only a startling resemblance—she cannot be here," he muttered, and he trembled like a wind-shaken leaf as the words of song burst from the lips of the lovely woman.

She had chosen well for that rough audience, and in silvery notes arose and fell the words of "Home, Sweet Home."

"Her voice—her face—her form! can there be two women in the world so alike?"

"Can there be two such beautiful faces to hide hearts so false?"

Again Hugh Lambert listened, and song after song came from the red lips, while adown the rough, sunburnt cheeks of the audience many a tear would roll, and teeth cut deep into the flesh to keep back the sobs that would well up as remembrance carried them back to the days of "auld lang syne."

A rough, untutored audience that beautiful woman sung to—men whose hands were red with human blood, many of them, and whose hearts were blackened with crime, yet even for all that who had feeling, deep and terrible beneath the rude exterior, and who were but as children under the spell of that wondrous voice singing the melodies of their childhood.

At length the curtain went down—the lovely songstress had done her duty, and yet not a sound of applause came in response; only one long-drawn sigh, a moan almost, that the end had come and they would hear no more.

Suddenly one man arose in the crowd; it was Buckskin Ben, the hunter, who had brought the extra stage on to Central City.

"Pards, jist keep yer seats fer I'm selected as ther rooster to navigate amid yer with a baskit, fer yer gold-dust, bein' as how you've g'in ther leddy a benefit. I'm a-comin', gerloots, so pass over yer chips," and Buckskin Ben began to push through the crowd a basket in hand, the enormous dimensions of which would have stampeded an eastern audience.

As for Hugh Lambert, he stood against the back wall, cowering like one who thought he had seen a ghost at midnight in a grave-yard; he seemed powerless to move or speak, and his arms hung nerveless at his sides, his bundles having dropped upon the floor unnoticed.

Nearer and nearer drew Buckskin Ben, talking in his quaint way as he moved along, and louder and louder resounded the musical clink of the gold as it fell, in almost a continuous stream, into the basket, for the miners of Central City had gone whole-souled into the benefit given the beautiful vocalist.

"Down with yer dust, pard; the game's played, the deal's over, an' ther gents is cashin' in thar chips. Whar's your chips, my scared-lookin' pilgrim?"

Hugh Lambert looked bewildered, and glanced up in a strange sort of way, while his moving lips uttered no word.

But suddenly he thrust his hands into his pockets, and drew them forth empty.

"I remember; I did not wait for my change at Conroy's grocery. I have no money," and he spoke like one in a dream, while a glance at the princely contribution—for the songstress had touched the pockets as well as the hearts of the miners—showed that his pittance would have been but a small sum to add to the golden donation.

"Too thin, my pensive pilgrim; you should ha' stayed out, ef yer had no dust. I'm waitin', pard, fer yer chips."

The face of Hugh Lambert flushed crimson, and then became deadly pale, and with a muttered imprecation, he thrust his hand into an inside pocket of his woolen shirt, and drew it forth containing an oval piece of gold, glittering with diamonds.

With a groan, that burst through his set teeth, he dashed the trinket into the basket, and turning rapidly fled from the scene, out into the darkness and storm, and running up against a man just entering the theater.

"That man is mad or desperate; if this were a gambling-hell he were leaving I could understand his wild manner," and Dead Shot, the Gold Bullet Sport, for by such name only was he yet known in Central City, entered the theater.

"Jist in time ter pay ther fiddler, pard," and Buckskin Ben thrust the contribution-basket under the nose of the new-comer.

"Certainly and with pleasure, though I am sorry I missed the singing," and Dead Shot threw a handful of gold coins into the basket.

"You air a trump keerd, pard, with yer dust

as yer shootin'-irons, an' yer top ther pile, unless this heur leads yer! but ther angil is goin' ter chin us another song when I gi'n her the dust she tolle me, an' yer is in time to git yer ears full o' dulcet honey, or I'm a liar. This leads yer, pard," and as Buckskin Ben spoke he held up the trinket thrown in the basket by Hugh Lambert.

"It are a pictur', by ginger! gold and dimints round it—a pictur' o' that very leddy that singed them ditties, or yer can call me a polecat."

Dead Shot gave one glance at the gold-incased diamond-studded miniature, and snatched it almost rudely from Buckskin Ben, his face white, and his hand trembling as he held it up to his gaze.

"God above! who gave this miniature?"

The voice was deep and quivering, and the hunter saw that the handsome stranger, so nervy "on the shoot," was moved deeply by the face before him.

"A pilgrim as had no money throwed it in ther basket, an' then levanted as tho' ther devil had sent for him."

"Who was he?"

"Don't know, pard; I'm a stranger in these diggin's."

"I will give you thrice the value of that portrait for it."

"C'u'dn't do it, pard, kase it was chipped in fer ther leddy. Mayhap she might let it go at that. She's at ther Central City House, whar you hang up."

Dead Shot gave another long look at the miniature, and then handed it reluctantly back to Buckskin Ben, while his head dropped forward, and he stood like a statue, as though lost in the deepest, most painful reverie.

In the meantime Buckskin Ben edged his way back to the front seats of the theater, where, accompanied by Judge Wolf, the proprietor of the Central City House, and the gentleman and his daughter who had come over in Dan Smith's coach, sat the beautiful vocalist, her face flushed with excitement, for never had she made such a decided "hit" as before the rude audience whom she had just entranced by her superb singing.

"Heur's ther dust, leddy, an' it's all yaller metal, 'ceptin' a leetle article as is worth more than half in ther basket. Now ther pilgrims w'u'd like yer ter tune up one more ditty fer them—somethin' melancholy like, as will fetch ther weeps, an' then, leddy, I'll shoulder yer dust down to Judge Wolf's lay-out fer yer."

Buckskin Ben placed the heavy basket upon the bench, and the woman arose and once more faced the audience.

Twice she essayed to sing, and her emotions choked her—the princely tribute had unnerved her, and the voice that had never faltered in public before trembled now as it rose in glorious melody—the words of that plaintive old ballad, "The long, long, weary day," floating quiveringly through the silent hall.

The songstress had reached the second verse—

"Alas! if land or sea had parted him from me—

"Alas! if land or sea had parted him from me—

I would not these sad tears be weeping;

But now he's dead and gone—gone far away from me—"

Then a man in the furthest end of the hall roused himself from his spellbound attitude, and gazed upon the singer. One glance, and a shriek—a man's shriek—rang out wild and thrilling, and a heavy fall was heard.

Dead Shot, the Gold Bullet Sport, had fallen like a dead man prone upon the floor, the moment his eyes had rested upon the face of the vocalist.

CHAPTER IV.

A THIRD SURPRISE.

In a pleasant room of the Central City House a woman paced the floor, her long trail rustling after her like the breakers upon the beach.

Upon the table, whereon stood the lamp, was a pile of gold, amounting to several thousand dollars, and in her clenched hand she held the miniature thrown into the basket by Hugh Lambert.

The face was as strangely beautiful as it was strangely sad, and the miniature was a perfect likeness of the maiden, though taken perhaps several years before, for it seemed a trifle younger; but there were the same red-gold hair braided in heavy coils, the same black eyes with their sweeping lashes, delicately penciled brows, and ruby lips, which with every word or smile displayed the pearldest teeth.

Upon the hotel books the maiden was registered as Miss Violet Markham, of New York city, and she had told Judge Wolf that she had been brought up for the stage, both as a vocalist and actress, and had saved up a small sum with which to prosecute a search for a person, said to be in the mines of Colorado, and who held a secret regarding her parentage which she wished to know.

When robbed by Captain Satan, she had been in despair; but now she had more gold than ever she had possessed before, owing to the generosity of the miners, and she was free to continue her search once more.

This was all that was known of the pretty

singer, and no other questions were asked her, for her face seemed a guarantee for her truthfulness; though, when it became known that a young miner had thrown into the basket as his contribution, a diamond-studded likeness of the maiden herself, and that Dead Shot—or "Tarleton," as he was registered at the Central City House—had fainted away when he caught sight of her face, there were some who believed that she had a history that was in some way mirrored in her sad face.

Now, as she paced the room with graceful sweep, the brows were contracted in deep and painful thought, and the lips moved in low utterance:

"Strange—oh, so very strange! I cannot account for it, and this doubt as to who and what they are nearly drives me mad. In some way those two men must be connected with me."

"Hugh Lambert they call him—a young miner who works a claim in the mountains, his universal bad luck, and is as poor as poverty, they say; yet he had this miniature of myself, set in gold and studded with diamonds worth as much as that pile of gold yonder."

"Where did he get it? and who can he be?"

"Hugh Lambert! I do not remember the name."

"And the other—Dead Shot they call him; the man who behaved so bravely, and beat off the Knights of the Overland single-handed; a splendid-looking man, and a gambler, they say, though no one seems to know aught regarding him; who fainted dead away when he saw my face. Who can he be?"

"Tarleton is the name on the register, but that tells me nothing."

"I must see these two men, and know why it is that my face moves them so. First, I will go to the miner in the mountains, for he had my picture. I can ride there on horseback, and one of those good miners will guide me; I will go down at once and make arrangements for an early start, for the storm is about over."

So saying, she left her room, locking the door after her, and descended to the hotel office, where Judge Wolf sat, conversing with a tall man, well-dressed, and with heavy beard, nearly concealing his face.

Both looked up as Violet Markham entered the little room, and the tall man sprung to his feet, his face livid, while from his lips broke the cry:

"God in Heaven! from the very grave!"

Without another word the man fled from the hotel as though from a weird being of another world.

"Miss Markham, your presence in our little town seems to have moved three men deeply," said Judge Wolf, gazing upon the maiden with a look of surprise.

"Judge Wolf, who was that man?"

"His name is Colonel Darke, at least he is known as such here. He owns the Deadman's Mine, a few miles from here, and must get a good thing out of it, as he always has plenty of money. Do you know him?"

"I do not remember ever to have seen him before, and there certainly seems a mystery in the behavior of three men to-night at sight of me—a mystery I am anxious to solve, and I wish to ask you if I can get a saddle-horse and guide in the morning, as I desire to go to the cabin of this Hugh Lambert, who so generously contributed my own likeness as his fee to-night."

"You can have a horse, Miss Markham, and a guide can be easily found for you."

"I thank you, Judge Wolf. Good-night, sir, and please have me an early breakfast," and Violet Markham swept from the room.

A moment after the man called Colonel Darke entered—he had evidently been watching outside.

"Wolf, who is that girl?" he asked, in his deep tones.

He was a man whose age it was hard to tell—he might be thirty, and perhaps forty-five. He was a fine-looking man, his cheeks, chin and mouth hidden by a long black beard, and his eyes deep-set, dark blue, and yet full of fire, while they were ever restless, hardly resting an instant on any face or object.

His form denoted strength and activity, and he wore a brown corduroy suit, and kept his coat open, as though to quickly get his hands upon the revolvers upon his hips.

A black slouch hat shaded his forehead, and his pants were stuck in cavalry boots.

"That is the very question she asked about you, colonel," said the judge with a smile, while he added:

"Did you think her a ghost?"

"She is either a woman I once knew well, or her ghost!"

"You believe in ghosts then, colonel?"

"No! that girl is the one I think it is, *in propria persona*, though I would have sworn on the Bible she was dead."

"Who did you think it was, colonel?"

"That is none of your business, sir; her presence startled me because I believed her in her grave. What does she call herself here?"

"Violet Markham."

"Ah! What is she doing?"

"That is *her* business, Colonel Darke," quietly answered the judge.

"You refuse to tell, then?"

"Oh no, I really do not know more about her than she has herself told; she was robbed by that overland curse, Captain Satan and his gang, and the boys gave her a benefit, and a royal one to-night, and never did I hear a better voice than she has, and I heard Jenny Lind, years ago."

"She was in one of the stages that arrived from Denver to-day, then?"

"Yes; she came over in the extra, whose driver was killed and passengers robbed, she among the number."

"Strange, very strange; her face really startled me," said the colonel, musingly.

"And you are only the third man she has startled to-night."

"How mean you, Wolf? You know I just came in from the Deadman's Mine."

"Well, a young miner in the mountains, evidently one who has seen better days and is a gentleman, threw into the contribution basket as his mite, a jewel-studded miniature of Miss Markham herself, and then fled from the theater; then one of the guests, Mr. Tarleton, and whom the boys have called Dead Shot, on account of the way he laid out six of Captain Satan's band this morning, gave a loud cry and fainted in the theater, when he caught sight of the young lady; now you run for your life when you see her. You know all I can tell you, colonel, and doubtless more, too."

"Doubtless. Now, where is this young miner?"

"He bolted for the mountains, the boys say."

"And this Dead Shot?"

"He soon recovered from his swoon, and came to his room and stayed awhile and just before you came he went down to the X. 10. U. 8. gambling saloon, for he asked me where he could try his fortune with the cards."

"He is a gambler, then, judge?"

"Doubtless, and a successful one, too, I should think."

"I will try my luck against his. Will you go down, judge?"

"Yes, I would like to see a game between you; he has any quantity of nerve, though he was upset by a woman's face, and you are known as the most successful hand with the cards in Central City."

Leaving the hotel under the colonel's assistant, Sling Rum, a Heathen Chinee, the two men wended their steps toward the X. 10. U. 8. gambling-hell.

CHAPTER V.

A MYSTERIOUS THEFT.

HARDLY had Judge Wolf and Colonel Darke passed out of the hotel, when a man's form was seen in the doorway—a form trembling, and a face white and haggard.

Upon his hat and shoulders were huge snowflakes, and yet, though he had evidently long been out in the storm, he did not tremble from cold; some deeper cause affected him.

Upon a chair near the open fire sat Sling Rum, the Chinee, his head bent upon the table, and a kitten playing with the end of his "pig-tail," that hung within a few inches of the floor.

As the wind howled without, the nostrils of Sling Rum played an accompaniment within doors in a deep basso that proved that the Celestial slept, and dreamt bright dreams under the influence of his favorite drug—opium.

Noiselessly the man at the door entered the room and glided toward the desk on which lay the register.

His eyes glanced over the names, and he said, half aloud:

"Miss Violet Markham, of New York—room 33—the same room I had the week I arrived. How strange!"

With another glance at Sling Rum he passed through the office out into the dimly-lighted hall, and noiselessly ascended the stairs until he reached the second floor.

Here all was darkness, excepting the faint light that came from the hall below; but as though acquainted with its surroundings, he glided forward until he came to a door at the furthest end of the passage.

Halting, he drew a long breath, and laid his hand upon the door-knob.

"Fool, that I should tremble so! What is she to me now? Nothing! and yet I risk life to come here and take from her that likeness which I madly threw away."

"But I will have it, cost what it may. She was pure when that was taken—pure as the now falling upon the mountains, and now—"

Nerving himself to the work before him, he silently turned the knob and gently opened the door.

The lamp burned brightly on the table, and before it sat Violet Markham, holding in her hand the miniature, upon which she gazed with a strange look.

Her wealth of golden hair hung loose about her shoulders and adown her back, and she wore a robe de nuit of blue and white silk that was very becoming to her.

The man stepped into the room and closed the door softly behind him, turning the key in the lock.

"Vivian!"

The name fell softly from the man's lips, but it reached the ears of the maiden, who glanced quickly up, beheld that trembling form, and white, haggard face so near her; she attempted to spring to her feet, endeavored to cry out, but strength and utterance failed her, and she slipped from the chair to the floor, wholly unconscious, yet still grasping the miniature with deathlike tenacity.

Now he seemed no longer the half-starved miner, for with giant stride he was by her side.

Dropping upon his knees he twined his arms about her waist and drew her to his broad breast an instant; then he seemed as though about to dash her to the floor in passionate fury; but, with strange inconsistency, checking his mad intention, he covered her lips with kisses.

Then, with a bitter curse he threw her from him, and springing to his feet began to pace the floor with quick, angry strides, while his brow became ominously dark and scowling.

"I am a fool; I forget she was false to me," and he gazed down upon the white face.

"Yes, thou wert false as Lucifer, Vivian, and I almost regret that I did not slay thee, and spare him. Had I done so, all these wretched years would not have been passed, for then I would have taken my own wretched life. Ha, hal your white bosom is as still now as though the spirit had departed, and I am tempted to—no, my hand cannot strike you now, for the bullet I aimed at him also found in you a target; it lodged in your fair neck, the papers said, and left a hideous scar."

He held the light so that its rays fell upon the neck—smooth and unmarred.

"Good God! *there is no scar!* Her form, her face; ay, and her voice, and yet no scar where my cruel bullet cut its way! This is strange!"

"But I must dream, for it can be none other. The scar has healed over. Ha! she revives, and if she sees me here her cries will alarm the house. Here is what I seek," and he tore from the small hand the costly set miniature.

Quickly he sprung to his feet, thrust the like-ness into his bosom and stepped toward the door.

There he halted and dropped his hand upon his knife-hilt, while he gritted forth:

"She was false to me, and—no, no, no, I was mad then, and I will not do it now. Let her live, for living will be her punishment."

Again he turned to the door, and the next moment glided out into the hallway, just as a wild cry burst from the lips of the woman—a cry such as Hugh Lambert had heard three years before when he shot the one he loved best in the world.

Pausing not Hugh Lambert fled down the steps out into the keen wind and icy storm.

But here he halted not, continuing his onward flight right out of Central City into the snow-drifts that lay upon the mountain slopes.

The way to his lonely cabin in the hills was a difficult one by day; but now, when the storm howled through the canyons, and the winds rushed relentlessly down from the lofty mountains, driving the snow in savage gusts before it, one would deem it utterly impossible for a man to find the road, or escape perishing in the cold.

But he struggled on with indomitable pluck, and though chilled to the very heart, kept up his rapid pace; in fact it was his only hope now to keep him from freezing to death.

On, on, on he staggered up the mountain-side, the snow driving in his face, and his beard and hair frozen fringe; yet he faltered not, though he failed to recognize any known landmark on the way to his cabin; but then the snow would hide all traces familiar to him he thought, and in fact he thought but little of his danger; his brain was in a whirl, his heart aching at his meeting with the woman again who, three years before, had played him false.

Suddenly there was another sound than that of the howling storm—a strange, dragging sound, half a heavy tramp, half a roll; but on Hugh Lambert pressed, unheeding, even if hearing, the strange noise.

Then came a savage growl, a roar, and, knife in hand, Hugh Lambert was struggling for life in the huge hairy arms of a monarch of the mountain—an immense grizzly bear.

Home to the hilt went the keen blade—once, twice, thrice with lightning and giant thrusts, and then the ground seemed to open beneath the feet of the struggling man and beast, and down, down, down fell the two until Hugh Lambert was lost in utter unconsciousness.

And the storm raged on for hours, the snow falling in masses; then the moon shone out clear and cold, lighting the dreary scene, but all trace of the short, fierce struggle was obliterated, and neither victor nor vanquished was visible.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TERRIBLE STAKE.

THE X. 10. U. 8. Saloon of Central City was certainly an institution in its way, and a spirited one to boot, for there was an extensive bar, behind which stood Red Turner, who could send the six bullets of his revolver into a given space, as easily as he could throw the ingredients of a

cocktail into a glass; then the gambling tables, where every game of chance known in the calendar of fickle fortune could be indulged in, and over which the game of life and death was almost nightly played, with death coming out the winner over some misfortune.

The bar and the gambling saloon were all in one large hall, and nightly was the place crowded with those who loved liquor for the excitement it would bring, and cards for the gold they might win—or lose.

The frequenters of this saloon with the very remarkable cognomen, were many of them characters in their peculiar way—men who gambled for love of gold, others from love of gambling; men who drank deep from the love of liquor, and others who were temperate from various causes—the principal one of which was that their tongues, untied by whisky, were wont to divulge strange secrets that had best remained hidden.

Others were there nightly, who squandered away the bright dust they dug by day, while many hoped to add to their laid up store a little more to hasten on the day of their return to their homes and their families.

Many bold and honest miners were steady workers, and visited the X. 10. U. 8. merely pour passer le temps, for the long evenings hung heavily upon their hands, or rather minds.

Then again there was a large class of desperate adventurers, upon whose heads, were the truth known about them, hung rewards for crimes committed, and who had saved their lives by flight, and were cursing their souls by adding deadlier deeds to the red list of the past.

Such was the gathering then the night upon which Judge Wolf, the proprietor of the Central City House, and Colonel Darke, the owner of Deadman's Mine, entered the saloon.

Both men were well known to all present—the judge, a quiet, inoffensive man, avoiding trouble always, yet never shirking the alternative if it were forced upon him; a man who kept a good hotel, pure liquors in his bar, and allowed no disturbances upon the premises, yet who was fond of a social glass and a game of cards, be the stakes what they might.

The colonel, a man known to no one in and around Central City, that any one had found out, who had owned the Deadman's Mine about two years, having won it at a game of cards, and staked his life against the "claim."

It was said to be a paying "lead," but had received its name from the fact that several men who had owned it, had been found dead there, a pistol-shot in their forehead to tell how they died.

But the colonel took a fancy to it a few days after he arrived in Central City, offered to buy it, and the proprietor refusing to sell, he offered to gamble for its possession, a proposition the owner, a California Spaniard, at once accepted.

Not having the value of the mine in money, Colonel Darke put his life against the balance and won the game, when the Californian a once attacked him, driven to frenzy by the loss of his valuable property, and the colonel at once promptly shot him through the heart, and had since been in undisputed possession, though there were those who were wont to say that some day another body, killed by a pistol-shot, would be found in the claim; but those chances Colonel Darke was willing to take.

Some said that he had been an officer of the army, who had committed a crime that sent him to the frontier as a fugitive; but this was only hearsay, and none really new anything about him, other than that he was an elegant gentleman in manners, a successful gambler, fearless and resolute, and always "on the shoot," if occasion demanded, and Deadman's Mine was believed to be a splendid property, as the colonel had gotten very rich in the two years he had owned it.

When not at the Central City House, the colonel lived in a slab-shanty at the mine, and dressed as a miner; in turn, he was considerable of a dandy in his attire, wearing corduroy, velvet or broadcloth, as the humor suited him.

Upon entering the saloon, the judge said, quickly:

"Drink, colonel?"

"Yes, thank you; brandy straight, Red."

Red Turner, named on account of his fiery-red hair and face, and not his carmine deeds, bowed pleasantly and placed the drinks upon the bar.

"Seen a man called Dead Shot to-night, Red?"

"No, colonel; oh, there he comes now, if you mean the gent who wiped out the Knights."

As Red Turner spoke Tarleton entered the saloon and approached the bar, and though he had changed his costume, all who had seen him at the hotel, on the arrival of the stage, at once knew him.

He now wore a suit of heavy blue material, the sack-coat serving as an overcoat, and a black felt hat with enormous brim, and a gold cord encircling it.

His pants were stuck in the top of his stylish boots, upon the heels of which were the gold spurs, and, as if to protect him from the driving

Gold Bullet Sport.

now, a scarf of blue silk encircled his neck, the ends hanging jauntily over his left shoulder.

Upon his hands were fine buckskin gauntlets, which he drew off as he approached the bar, the act displaying a splendid diamond upon the little finger of his left hand, and he carried the riding-whip, with its gold, gem-studded handle.

If he was armed he did not exhibit his weapons, but all felt he was not the man to come to such a place without being well "heeled."

A murmur of admiration went round the crowded room as he entered, and every eye was turned upon him, and every tongue willing to admit that he was a superb specimen of manhood.

Had it not been known what he could do, some reckless fellow present would doubtless at once have "bounced" him on account of his elegant appearance; but Dan Smith's tongue had been busy ever since the coach came in, and the town was alive with the exploits of the Gold Bullet Sport.

Raising his hat, he shook back the long waving hair, the act displaying his well balanced head, and causing him, with his beardless face to look almost boyish, though he was doubtless thirty.

His eye falling upon Dan Smith, as he glanced over the room quietly, he motioned to him and his companion, who was none other than Buckskin Ben, to approach.

"Join me in a drink, gentlemen—ah! Judge Wolf, will you and your friend also do me the honor?" and Dead Shot turned to the proprietor of the Central City House.

"With pleasure, sir; this is Colonel Darke, Mr. Tarleton."

The two men looked each other in the eyes, and there was something in the glance of each that caused those who saw it, to believe that they had met before.

The colonel started, and his usually pale face turned a shade paler, while a strange light flashed in his eyes, and Tarleton smiled, yet there was much in that smile.

"I am glad to meet Colonel Darke. What will you take, gentlemen?"

The drinks were placed before the five men, and dashed off at a swallow, after which Colonel Darke said, pleasantly:

"Now, gentlemen, who are for a friendly game?"

"Not me, you bet, colonel, kase I knows yer luck too well," said Dan Smith.

"And I will be excused to-night," was the reply of Judge Wolf, "and my friend, Buckskin Ben here, was robbed to-day," he continued.

"Yas, they snaked a leetle dust out o' my ole clothes, but I allus has a savin' bank in another portion o' my garmints; I hain't broke, but I guess as how I won't chip in this night o' our Lord, Anny Dominecker, eighteen fifty-nine."

"Then it lies between Mr. Tarleton and myself," smiled Colonel Darke.

"I will play with you, sir. I came here to while away an hour or two. There is a table," and Dead Shot led the way to a table which had been purposely vacated by its occupants, who were most anxious to see a game between the stranger and the colonel.

"What stakes shall we begin with?" asked Colonel Darke.

"I am wholly indifferent, sir; make them what you please," was the cool rejoinder.

This pleased the colonel immensely, and he drew out his buckskin purse.

"Better make it int'restin' fer ther boys, colonel, as yer did two years ago, an' play ther Deadman's Mine ag'in' so much. You has had it two year now an' hasn't passed in yer checks," said Dan Smith.

Dead Shot looked up as though for explanation.

"Dan refers to my claim, sir, which I work in the mountains. I won it from a Californian, staking five thousand and my life against it. The loser got mad at his loss and I was forced to kill him."

This was said with the utmost coolness, but the dark-blue eyes of the colonel never left the face of Dead Shot as he spoke.

But the face of Tarleton remained perfectly emotionless, and he said, smiling:

"What do you consider the mine worth?"

"It pays me a good many thousand a year."

"Do you gamble for gain, sir, or the pleasure of the excitement, may I ask?"

"Wholly for pleasure, Mr. Tarleton."

"Then I will stake my life and ten thousand against the mine. If I lose, you get my money and you can take my life. If I win, the mine and your life belong to me."

Every man in the saloon was on his feet in an instant, excepting Dead Shot and Colonel Darke; they kept their seats, and, after clearing his throat, the colonel replied without a tremor:

"So be it, sir. What shall the game be?"

"Three out of five win. If you consider your mine worth more than ten thousand I will stake more against it."

"That sum is sufficient. Red Turner, give us a new pack of cards here."

The cards were brought, shuffled, and the

hands dealt out; then a silence, such as broods around a tomb, fell upon all as the game began.

CHAPTER VII.

MARKED FOR LIFE.

WITH an evenness that created the very intensity of excitement in the lookers-on, the games between Colonel Darke and Dead Shot progressed, until four had been played, each one won alternately by the players, and but the deciding fifth yet remaining.

Colonel Darke's face was now almost black with passion, yet his nerves were steady and his voice calm, while Dead Shot was as cool as though it were a mere game of amusement, and his eyes, as he now and then glanced over the excited men around the table, seemed no brighter than before.

The hand of the fifth and last game was dealt by Colonel Darke, who, ere he had raised his cards from the table, said sternly:

"A glass of brandy, Red; will you drink, sir?"

"No, thank you, colonel," was the calm rejoinder of Dead Shot.

Red Turner brought a decanter of brandy and a glass, and the colonel filled the tumbler and dashed off the fiery liquor; then he repeated the drink, and shoved the bottle back to the bartender, who, since the beginning of the game had not been called on for his services up to that time.

"Now, sir," and Colonel Darke raised his cards from the table and glanced over them, Dead Shot having already done so with his "hand," and the quiet smile never left his face.

Colonel Darke led and Dead Shot "trumped," and so it went on. The game was played slowly, the crowd holding their breath, until the end. Then a yell broke from half a hundred throats, as Tarleton said, calmly:

"I have won, Colonel Darke."

The colonel was on his feet in an instant, his hand under his coat, but the gold-mounted revolver of Dead Shot already looked him straight in the eyes, while the deep voice of the miner cried:

"None of that, sir! I won the game fairly, and the mine belongs to me. Your life I will not now take, but that I may know my own property, if it should stray into other pastures, I will *mark you for life!*"

The pistol flashed suddenly, not five feet from the head of Colonel Drake, who staggered back as he felt a stinging pain in his ear, while the bullet went on and flattened itself against a marble statue behind the bar.

"You are not hurt, sir; I merely bored a hole through your left ear. I will take possession of my mine in the morning," and Dead Shot stepped to the bar, and added:

"Gentlemen, join me in a drink, please!"

All present, with one exception, ranged themselves in front of the bar; that exception was Colonel Darke, who, with a bitter curse upon his lips, had left the saloon.

"Stranger, yer sent that bullet clean through ther colonel's left ear; I see ther hole myself," said Buckskin Ben admiringly.

"Didn't I say he c'u'd handle the shootin'-irons? Yer bet I never wags a false lip. Thar's the bullet, Red, jist pass it over an' let ther boys have a squint at it; they'll find it ther yaller dust, you bet," cried Dan Smith, feeling that Dead Shot was his godson, he having baptized him.

The bullet was passed around to the crowd, flattened out the size of a five-dollar gold-piece, and was pronounced *pure gold*.

"Pard, how is it yer can waste ther metal that way?" asked another admirer, peering forward.

"I never waste my bullets, my friend; I always hit where I aim. Gentlemen, my regards," and the drinks were dashed off with a gusto, while Red Turner tacked the flattened bullet up over the bar, with this startling announcement beneath, written in a very crooked hand, for a shot that had gone so straight to the mark.

"Ther gold bullet as boared ther left hearer o' Kurnil Dark—shoted by Ded Shot ther Gold Bullet Sport, in this heur serloon."

After his "treat" the crowd expected to see Dead Shot leave the saloon; but on the contrary, he walked over to a distant table and sat down with Judge Wolf, who had taken a great fancy to the strange man, and there they were seated in conversation when the door opened and admitted four well-known characters in Central City, and men feared as much as they were disliked.

Nominally they were miners, and they pretended to work a mine several miles from town; but when they ever worked none knew, as they were more frequently seen loafing the streets, or gambling in the saloons.

They were called the Angel Quartette, on account, it was supposed, of their being so wholly the opposite of what their name would designate, and perhaps because they all had good voices and certainly sung exceedingly well together, the only recommendation they had.

Some said they were brothers, for they were all over six feet, powerfully built, and heavily

bearded, while they were "walking arsenals," in the way of being armed.

If a row occurred the angel Quartette always "chipped in," as they expressed it, and they were dangerous and desperate men, as many a poor wretch had reason to know.

Their names, individually, were Jack, King, Queen and Ace—at least such they called themselves, and which was the trump of the four, none had been able to decide, not even their enemies.

As they now entered the saloon, the crowd, as though by common consent, gave them room, and they ranged themselves before the bar, and calling for drinks, each one in turn treated the party all round, their favorite way of drinking, and each time they changed the liquor, disposing of brandy, gin, whisky and rum.

"Now, we're ready for biz. Thar's a chap heur as kin play keerds tip-top, we larn; trot 'im out, Red Head."

This was addressed to Red Turner, and the speaker was one who called himself Jack.

"Thar's a few chaps heur, pard, as can handle ther papers—ter whom do yer refer?"

As he spoke, Buckskin Ben stepped before the bully.

"I refers to any man as isn't afeerd ter put his dust up on a game o' keerds. Is you ther galoot as has jist won ther Deadman's Mine?"

"No, I isn't him; thar sits ther pilgrim over thar, an' ef yer don't want ter get chawed up yer had better not tackle him, kase he's clear grit clean through."

"He's yer pard, then?" and the four bullies glanced over to where Dead Shot sat, apparently not noticing the new arrivals.

"Any man as is honest is my pard," was Buckskin Ben's uncompromising rejoinder.

"You is a stranger heur, I guesses?"

"Yas, I jist comed up fer a leetle tramp, bein' as pelts has been prime o' late an' I had a leetle metal ter spend fer pizen an' sich like."

"What is yer biz, may I ax, in a friendly way?"

"My biz are not ter meddle with that which don't consarn me, yer durned shanghigh," was the quick retort of Buckskin Ben, and he dropped his hand on his revolver, but the weapons of the other three of the Quartette already covered him, while all four burst forth into a rude laugh.

"Gentlemen, this is not a fair deal."

The voice was calm, deep, and resolute, and all eyes turned to behold Dead Shot confronting the Angel Quartette, his gold-mounted revolvers in each hand, and, in some mysterious way, seemingly aiming at the heads of the four bullies.

"Yer has ther deadwood on us, pard. Let up an' we'll liquor up all round."

It was the Ace who spoke, and as he knew his danger, he wished to "crawfish" as well as was in his power.

"And I intend to hold it. No, I never drink with a gang of cutthroats," and Dead Shot smiled as sweetly as though he had paid a compliment.

A quick, telegraphic look passed between the four men, and each one seemed to read what was in the others' thoughts, for, with one accord, they laid their pistols upon the bar, and Ace said, reproachfully:

"Stranger, yer has insulted us, but seein' as how we is four an' you is one, we won't chip in ag'in' yer with our irons, kase it wouldn't be ther squar' thing."

"You lie! You all turned against that man, and I stepped forward to see fair play. You came here to cause a row, and if there is trouble it shall be with me; if you wish to avoid it, there is the door."

This stand of Dead Shot was a new feature, and the crowd quickly moved out of range of both parties, all excepting Judge Wolf and Buckskin Ben—they kept their stand near Tarleton, while Dan Smith dodged behind a convenient post, and called out:

"Ef yer needs me, Dead Shot, I'm on hand, you bet; but I'se paid ter drive stage, an' not ter fight, onless that's good cause; 'sides, I hain't bin weaned yet, an' my mammy are awful 'ticular with her boy."

But while he spoke Dan had a revolver in each hand, and he was ready for work, if his "godson" got into trouble.

"Pard, I guesses as how I'm 'bleeged ter yer, but this are my funeral," said Buckskin Ben, quietly, to Dead Shot, while Judge Wolf remarked:

"I think this matter better be dropped where it is. Turner, set up drinks."

"We'll drink with yer, an' we'll shoot with yer, jedge; but fust let us clip this game-cock's feathers. He tole us an' comp'ny ter leave this heur layout—am I right, stranger?" and Ace turned to Dead Shot, whose cool rejoinder struck home.

"You are, and if you do not leave I shall put you out."

How it all occurred none knew; but, as of one accord, the four bullies sprung upon Dead Shot; two shots were heard; two heavy falls followed, and then a mass of struggling humanity that went rapidly toward the door! A giant effort, a crash of boards, and two men were hurled out of the saloon; then one man again approached

the bar—that one was the Gold Bullet Sport—calm, his face slightly flushed, and his hand as firm as a rock, as he took up the brandy decanter and poured out a generous drink.

"Tarleton, by G—! I never saw such an exhibition of strength," cried Judge Wolf, aroused out of his quiet manner by his enthusiastic admiration.

"He ha' made a duett o' ther quartette—sartin," said Dan Smith, bending over the two bullies, who were Ace and Jack.

"An' has them atween the eyes," replied another, while a burly fellow cried out:

"Pards, I has struck a lead an' this are my clearin', kase I knows whar ther gold is, an' am goin' ter play doctor an' extract these heur bullets, or I'm not a gentleman."

A general laugh followed the remark of the miner, who, a moment after, arose with the two gold bullets in his hand, while he shouted:

"My treat, nabobs! Step up an' gi'n yer stomicks a surprise. Stranger, I'm yer shadder ef yer is goin' ter sling them bullets round, yer bet. We'll be dentists tergether; *you* plug, an' *I'll* draw. Red, a bottle o' wine fer ther Sport."

Dead Shot bowed his thanks, and refusing the wine, took a drink of brandy, and moved toward the door, accompanied by Judge Wolf, Buckskin Ben, and Dan Smith, while a voice called out:

"Keep yer eye on him, pards, kase the King and Queen hain't dead yit, an' they ain't no slouch on ther shoot."

The words were greeted with a loud cheer by the crowd, who tumbled the bodies of the bullies unceremoniously into the street.

As Dead Shot and his party passed on through the snow, on the way to the hotel, two men came from the shadow of a building near the saloon, and raising the dead bodies of the Ace and Jack, bore them away in the darkness. Those two men were the King and Queen, and already had they sworn a terrible oath of vengeance against the Gold Bullet Sport.

CHAPTER VIII.

VIOLET MARKHAM RUNS INTO THE LION'S DEN.
WITH the early morning Violet Markham arose and quickly robed herself in warm clothing for her intended trip to the mountain cabin of Hugh Lambert.

When she recovered consciousness, and gave the loud shriek which caused the miner to fly, she had found the miniature gone, and her thought was that it had been stolen by the one whose unexpected presence in her room had so startled her.

Believing her door locked, and suddenly discovering a white, haggard face and trembling form near her, her usually strong nerves had failed her, and she indulged in a woman's prerogative in danger—that is, had fainted away.

That the visitor to her room had robbed her of the miniature she was certain; but why had he not taken the gold, for it lay before him upon the table?

This she could not understand, and she turned it over and over again in her mind, as she paced her room in nervous excitement, for the howling of the storm without, and the loud snoring of Sling Rum within, prevented her cry from attracting any notice.

At length she locked her door, and leaving her lamp burning, threw herself upon her bed to rest, and, to her surprise, soon dropped off into a deep sleep.

When she awoke the sun was shining in at her windows, and the storm had cleared away, leaving the whole town, valley and mountains, under a snowy mantle.

"This storm is the breaking up of the winter, and the spring will soon come. It cannot be very dangerous to go into the mountains with a good guide; it is only a few miles to his cabin, and I must learn where he got that picture. Hugh Lambert, a poverty-stricken miner, they call him, and yet, he had a trinket worth a small fortune; but the miniature is gone, and—ah! I wonder if he took it from me?"

"Well, I must solve the mystery, and then I can search for him whom I came here to find."

Thus musing while she dressed, Violet Markham led herself deeper than ever into the mystery hanging over her; but at last she descended to the breakfast-room and was pleasantly greeted by Judge Wolf, who, no matter how late the hours he kept, was always an early riser.

"You are determined to make the trip, then, Miss Markham?"

"Yes, sir. Is my horse ready, and did you get me a good guide?"

"Both await your pleasure, miss; but you had better wait a week or two, then the snow will be gone, and our hard weather will be over. This last snow-storm was a surprise to us, for we flattered ourselves that spring had come."

"I cannot wait, sir; I have other duties to occupy me in this part of the country; but, will you kindly take charge of my sachet of gold? It is in my room."

"Certainly, Miss Markham, and while you eat your breakfast I will have my cook put you up a substantial lunch, to which I will add a flask of brandy, for you may need it in the

mountains. Your horse is a good one, and your guide comes well recommended to me."

A quarter of an hour after Violet Markham was mounted upon a fine sorrel mare, and that she was a splendid equestrienne was evident at a glance.

Before her, also well mounted, was a tall, thin, ungainly man, who, to keep warm, wore several pairs of pants and as many woolen shirts, which gave him the appearance of a stuffed skeleton.

His face none could diagnose, as he always held it earthward, and he spoke in a quick, jerky manner, as though words in his mouth had a bad taste and he wished to spit them out.

Violet Markham was not pleased with her guide, for she heard a remark he made to Judge Wolf, as she stood within the doorway.

"But, suppose we find ther body—an' in ther blindin' snow he set out in, it's likely we will—who's to hold her when she faints, jedge? I never was much shakes with weemen, now how."

"Well, you will do your best for her, Slim Ike, won't you?"

"Yas, jedge, yer kin deepend on me, as on a mule's hind leg; but it's more'n likely I'll fetch back two corpses, kase this hain't no baby's play."

Just then Violet came out of the door, and Judge Wolf hastened to say:

"This is your guide, Miss Markham; his name is Slim Ike."

"At yer service, miss, but I was a-sayin' ter ther jedge yer was a bloody idiyit ter go inter ther mount'ins this day; but if yer says so, I'm yer pardner fer ther trip."

"I do say so; I wish to go to the cabin of a miner known as Hugh Lambert; do you know the place?"

"As well as I does benzine, miss. I are ready." And the two rode away upon their perilous journey.

"Judge, where is that lady going, may I ask?"

Judge Wolf turned and beheld Dead Shot by his side—calm, fresh-looking, and dressed as he had been upon his arrival at Central City—velvet jacket, white corduroy pants, and light slouch hat.

"She has undertaken a foolhardy ride to the mountains, to find the young miner who threw her miniature into the basket at the concert last night, and a costly thing it was, though the poor fellow is said to be starving that had it."

"I remember it was spoken of last night. She is a plucky woman to venture out after such a storm. Her name is Violet Markham, I see by the books?"

"Yes, as such she is registered. Have you breakfasted?"

"Not yet; I will go in now; and after breakfast I wish to get a good horse for a ride—I would rather buy than hire."

"There is a splendid animal in my stable for sale—left by a miner who has gone to Denver; but he is 'way up in price."

"I'll take him if he is what you represent. Please have him ready for me after breakfast," and Dead Shot glanced down the street after Violet Markham and her guide, and a look of the deepest sadness came into his splendid eyes—a look called there by memories of a bitter by-gone.

In the meantime Violet and Slim Ike rode as rapidly on as the deep snow would admit, and leaving the town, pressed forward across ravine and lonely gulch to the spur of the foothills, and then upward under the shadow of the gloomy pines, the guide's eye constantly bent down, as though expecting to come upon a little mound of snow heaped up over a dead body.

Snow-drifts there, snow-drifts here, snow-drifts everywhere—covering huge boulders, chocking up the mouths of abandoned "shafts," and lying in great, cold, white waves along the level reaches; still no sign of where Hugh Lambert had been overcome by the fierce storm and sunk down to die, with the snow for his shroud.

"Thar, miss, ef yer'll raise yer head so as to fix yer eyes on that p'int up yender, yer will see whar the cabin are—back in ther pines," and Slim Ike pointed with his finger to a lofty spur of the mountain, yet never raised his own eyes from the snow-covered ground.

"It are a good location ter view ther kentry, ma'm, but a durned lonely place ter hang out in; but then, he went thar to git a firm foundation. Every claim he tackled in ther valley having fotched him nary red, up thar he said he'd give his luck a bottom to back its everlastingness ag'in."

"Away up there! I see it, yet there is no smoke coming up from above the pines. There is a column of blue vapor; and there another, and another, to mark the cabin of some miner, yet it seems deserted. Perhaps he perished in the storm."

"Oh, he may be thar, an' he may not—no tellin', ma'm—he's a queer one; but we'll push ahead ef ye say so, kase we'll freeze inter marble statues ef we stan' heur convarsin'."

"I am r'ady, guide; I will go to the cabin, anyway."

"It are as you say, ma'm; you is ther cap-

t'in," and he led on, without expressing the thought in his mind, that the one they sought was then lying somewhere beneath one of the huge snowdrifts, to be found only when the springs suns melted the icy fields upon the mountains.

In arduous climbing another hour passed away, and then Central City lay far below them, and the humble cabin of the miner was only a few paces distant.

Slim Ike sprung from his tired steed and knocked at the door; but no response came, and with a vigorous kick he dashed it in. The cabin was deserted!

In an instant Violet Markham was within the rude shanty, and a look of surprise rested upon her face, as she asked:

"And this was his home?"

"It war, ma'm, true as Scripter; it ain't no palace, now, is it?"

"No."

The word came crisp from her lips, as if she disliked to break her train of thought, painful though it might be.

"This is a cheerless place for one to live who had that miniature—a cheerless, desolate place, indeed," and she glanced pityingly at the tattered blankets, the meager furniture, if such it could be called, and at the drifts of snow driven in through the cracks in walls and roof.

Upon the hearth burned a few coals still glowing, yet they gave out no warmth; but Slim Ike quickly had a blazing fire, while the woman stood in silence watching him, and seemingly unconscious of the cold.

"Where is he?" she suddenly asked, as if just realizing that the one of whom she came in search was not there.

"Gone up ther flume."

"What?"

"He's passed in his checks, ma'm."

"I do not understand, guide."

"I guesses as how he's not heur."

"That I can see; but where is he?"

"He's levanted, or caved—defunct, or play-ed."

This was so much Greek to Violet Markham, and she again asked:

"Do you think he is dead?"

"Now yer've struck ther bull's-eye, ma'am; he's dead; ef he hain't, then he's tougher than a grizzly."

"I sincerely hope not; but it certainly seems as though the poor man must have perished, if he attempted to come home in the storm last night," said the woman, sadly.

"Waal, he did undertook it, kase I see'd him set out up ther valley myse'f, an' he was makin' tracks lively, yer kin bet."

"Poor fellow—from my heart I pity him, and would to God I could have seen him; but what is to be done now?"

"Surround a drop o' pizen, an' fill yer bread-baskit with some o' ther wittles yer fotched from ther jedge's—that's my strong hold, ma'am, an' then we'll take ther back trail fer ther city."

In spite of her disappointment Violet Markham followed the advice of Slim Ike, and ate a good luncheon, after which she signified her willingness to return; but as she did so, a tall form darkened the narrow doorway, and a man with masked face, and revolver in hand, stood before her.

At a glance she recognized the leader of the Knights of the Overland, who had attacked the stage the day before.

It was Captain Satan himself, that confronted her!

CHAPTER IX.

A DASTARD'S ACT.

WHEN the form of Captain Satan appeared, like an apparition in the door of the cabin, Violet Markham started back with a cry of surprise and alarm commingled, and a foreboding of coming evil swept over her.

But Slim Ike was at once on the alert, and awakened from his calm manner by the sight of the intruder, threw his revolver quickly forward, this time looking squarely in the face of Captain Satan, as he cried:

"Yer've treed ther wrong 'coon, pardner, an' I guesses yer had better levant, kase I holds ther drop on yer, an' I'm on ther shoot all ther time."

Captain Satan never moved in his tracks, or touched his revolver; but a quiet, mocking laugh broke from his lips, and the glitter of his eyes could be seen through the almond-shaped holes in his red mask.

He was a tall man of fine physique, and was dressed in black pants, stuck in high-top boots, a red shirt of thick material and a sombrero, encircled by a red cord, while from his shoulders, but the flaps thrown back, as though to give his arms full play, was a heavy cloak, such as is worn by cavalry officers.

Around his waist was a belt, containing several revolvers, and upon his hands were gauntlet gloves, while beneath his mask hung a long, blonde beard, and his hair, the same hue, was cut short.

What the face was, beneath that impenetrable red mask none could tell.

The mocking laugh of the Knight of the

Gold Bullet Sport.

Overland, who, for more than a year had made himself the terror of the road, infuriated Slim Ike, and he yelled out:

"Yer laff at me, yer durned red-faced devil, do yer? I guesses as how I'll turn ther laff ter weeps. Take that!"

The pistol exploded, but ere it did so, a second before, there came a report from the corner of the cabin, and Slim Ike fell like a log in his tracks, his bullet going above the head of Captain Satan, who never moved or flinched, while Violet Markham gave a cry of horror, as the form of her guide lay motionless before her.

"This is a lonely place for a fair lady," and Captain Satan bowed politely to Violet.

"I prefer its loneliness, sir, to your ill-omened company," was the quick retort.

"We cannot have all we wish in this world, dear lady."

"Stand aside, sir, and let me pass."

"And whither would you go?"

"Back to the town. I came here for an object which I failed to accomplish. Had I known that you dared to venture this near to Central City I should have come better protected."

"I dare do anything, and no force with you could have prevented my getting you into my power. When I made you pay tribute yesterday on the highway, I knew not who you were; now that I know you, I intend to hold you prisoner, unless you willingly go with one who has the right to protect you."

"In Heaven's name, who are you?"

"Men call me Captain Satan, of the Knights of the Overland."

"True, and from all accounts you deserve your name; but who are you, I again ask, that lays claim to me as my protector?"

"One who loves you—one who has loved you from your girlhood, and who has long mourned you dead—who, believing you dead, without one hope in life, went from bad to worse until he won the name of Road Agent. Now, do you know me?"

"No, nor do I wish to. Stand aside and allow me to pass."

"It is a dangerous road, and you can never reach the town without a guide."

"I can follow our trail made in coming here. Oh! why did you have that poor fellow shot down?" and Violet gazed sadly upon the motionless form of Slim Ike.

"He covered my heart with his revolver, and my men never allow harm to befall me; but this is idle talk. What was Hugh Lambert to you that you came here to seek him?"

"That was what I desired to learn. In this land, where every man wears a false appellation, one cannot tell by a name who a person is. Witness yourself for instance."

"True, and I may say you, as Violet Markham, are not what you seem."

"I do not understand."

"No, you will not understand; but again would I ask, what is Dead Shot, the Gold Bullet Sport—he registers as Tarleton at the hotel—what is he to you?"

"I never saw him to my knowledge."

"Yet he fainted at sight of you, at the concert last night, I am told."

"So I was informed. His may be, and doubtless is, one of those cases of fictitious names; did I see him, or know his real name, I would know him, perhaps."

"Again, one Colonel Darke, the owner of the Deadman's Mine, and an adventurer, fled at sight of you last night, I heard; fled as though you were a ghost. What is he to you?"

"I know not. I saw him but an instant, and failed to recall in him any one I had ever before met."

"And what I am to you, you profess not to know?"

"Remove your mask, if you are not ashamed of your face, and I will at once tell you."

"I am half-tempted to do so."

"Be fully tempted. The red mask is doubtless the reflection of your red heart," fearlessly said the woman.

"You read well—it is; but now I will not oblige you, for my own brave knights never know me as I am—they never saw my face undisguised, and they have seen me play half a dozen parts successfully; but, will you go with me willingly when I swear to you that I am the only living being who has the right to be your protector?"

"I will not! Stand aside, I again command you."

"No, you must go as my prisoner, if you will not accompany me willingly."

Violet Markham started back, and thrust her hand into the bosom of her riding-habit. It was withdrawn, grasping a small revolver.

"Ha! ha! that is good acting," laughed Captain Satan.

"You will find it deadly reality if you advance upon me," firmly said the woman.

"Girl, you are a precious little fool. See there!"

He pointed to the form of Slim Ike.

"I see—you are guilty of his murder."

"So be it. I will be guilty through the same means, of yours, for you are covered by half a dozen weapons, this instant, and in protecting

their chief my knights know not a woman from a man."

"Coward! afraid of a woman!" and Violet spoke with the very intensity of scorn.

"I am afraid of anything or anybody that endangers my life. Come, give me that plaything, and go with me willingly, otherwise you will have to do so, for I shall use force, and riding along unbound, you will find far more pleasant than being held in the arms of one of my knights."

Violet Markham saw that she was wholly in the power of the man before her, and she determined to yield with good grace, and trust to future developments to escape from her present predicament.

"What is your intention regarding me?" she asked calmly.

"That we will discuss at leisure, when you are an inmate of my mountain palace. Come, give me that weapon."

"I will go with you, if you will not use force; but I shall not relinquish this pistol; it may prove to be my only friend."

"Mayhap it will. A good revolver, a quick eye and steady hand, are a man's best friends in this world, and might prove a woman's too. You are wise in your decision; permit me to aid you to your saddle."

Without a word Violet submitted, and leaving the cabin, was at once placed in her saddle, her horse being held by a man, also in red mask, as were the half-dozen other men standing near the cabin.

"Come, men," and mounting a large iron-gray horse, held for him by one of his band, Captain Satan placed himself by the side of Violet Markham, and started off, at as rapid a pace as was possible, on account of the snow, further into the recesses of the mountains, his half-score of followers bringing up the rear, after they had robbed Slim Ike of all that he had valuable about him, which was precious little indeed.

Hardly had the Knights of the Overland been gone ten minutes when Slim Ike suddenly sat up, without any premonitory symptom that he was not dead, as all had believed him, for the blood trickled from a wound in the back of his head, and stained the dirt floor of the cabin.

"I guesses as how I hain't so dead as I looked, owin' ter ther hardness o' my calabash, which jist turned ther ball up under ther skulp; but I thought it were more healthy ter play possum, or ther mout hev bin a corpse pervised fer a funeral, an' this child mout hev needed mournin' fer by his relations."

"An' thet are Captain Satan, an' he are acquainted with the putty gal as I guided heur ter this durned shebang?"

"Waal, ef she don't show her claws ef he fools with her, yer kin call me an Injun. I thought at one time ther curt'in had riz an' ther circus had begun, when she draw'd thet weepin. Lucky fer her she didn't use it, kase them devils w'u'd ha' shotched her, sartin."

"Now, what's ter be did? I are afoot—no benzine, an' it are a long way ter town; but it are far more comfortable then bein' dead; yer may gamble on thet fact, Slim Ike."

"Captain Satan's got ther gal, an' he's ther man ter hold her; but then, she's a gal, an' ther fellers in Central hain't goin' ter let him hev her without tryin' fer ter get her back ag'in—but, who in thunder's this, an' I no shootin'-irons? Guesses I'll play dead ag'in. It are more healthy to play dead, than ter be dead."

So saying, Slim Ike tumbled over again upon the ground, lying so as to show the wound in his head to any one entering the cabin.

A step was heard without; a form darkened the doorway, and Dead-Shot, the Gold Bullet Sport, entered the cabin, a revolver, cocked, in each hand.

CHAPTER X.

AS THOUGH FROM THE GRAVE.

THE gentleman and young lady who had come over from Denver in Dan Smith's stage, and who had witnessed the splendid daring of Dead Shot, were Major Louis Melton and his daughter Florence.

The major was a Texan, and had been stationed for several years upon the north-western frontier, where, being a widower, his daughter had lived with him, after graduating at a fashionable boarding-school in Chicago, and her beauty of face and form had won the hearts of all the officers on duty on the border.

Inheriting a snug little sum in cash from an old aunt, Major Melton had resigned his commission and invested in mining interests, until he at length purchased the Grizzly Mine, some little distance from Central City, and thither he wended his way, determined to make his home near his new acquisition, at least until he dug enough gold out of it to enable him to go East and live in luxury, or travel in Europe, where he could marry his daughter off to some foreign nobleman—one of the weaknesses of the major, this latter desire.

Florence Melton, when presented to the reader, was a haughty beauty of nineteen—a thorough brunette, and one who was not easily frightened by the wild scenes of the frontier, for from her girlhood, excepting the five years

she had been East at boarding-school, she had mingled in border life.

She was as lovely in character as she was in face, yet about her was a certain reserve that kept men from becoming too intimate with her.

When arriving at Central City, and learning how Violet Markham had been robbed, she had, with her father, taken a great interest in the lonely girl, and, the major's wound being a mere gash in the scalp, they had accompanied her to the theater, glad that the honest miners were going to give her a volunteer benefit in her misfortune.

Though neither father nor daughter could understand the strange effect Violet's presence had had upon Hugh Lambert and Tarleton, they felt that she was truthful in saying that she did not know the two men, and in talking the matter over together that night, the major and Florence determined to offer the lonely girl a home with them, as long as she would remain in Central City, for it was the determination of the owner of the valuable Grizzly Mine to get a home in town and go to housekeeping.

Upon descending to a very late breakfast the following morning, the two were greatly surprised to learn that a third man, Colonel Darke, had been strangely moved upon catching sight of Violet Markham, and that she had gone off on horseback, with only a guide, to find Hugh Lambert, and learn from him the secret of his possession of the diamond-gemmed miniature of herself. Had they known of the midnight visitor to the maiden's room, and the theft of that same valuable likeness, they would have been still more astonished; but it will be remembered that the strange girl kept to herself this circumstance.

From Judge Wolf the major, and Florence also, heard of the remarkable game at the X. 10. U. 8. saloon, between Dead Shot and Colonel Darke, and the part the Gold Bullet Sport played in the affair with the Angel Quartette.

"I tell you, major," said the judge—as the officer and his daughter sat waiting for their breakfast, which Gin Sling, the Chinese cook of the hotel, was preparing—"I tell you, major, I never saw such a remarkable man as that Mr. Tarleton, whom Dan Smith has appropriately named Dead Shot.

"With an eye of fire, he yet has the sad, soft glance of a woman, and his manners are just as elegant as can be. Even in the deadliest danger he is as cool as ice, and smiles as sweetly as a boy looking at his sweetheart."

"You should have seen him last night dressed elegantly, and as handsome as a picture and yet dropping the Ace and Jack of the Angel Quartette with two of his gold bullets and hurling the King and Queen clean through the door of the X. 10. U. 8. without so much as ruffling his shirt."

"And he staked his life, you say, Judge Wolf, against this Deadman's Mine?"

"Yes, major, and won; but he did not kill the colonel, and I do not think would have marked him, if Darke, in rage at his defeat, had not attempted to draw on him; then he bored a hole in his left ear and told the colonel that he wished to mark him so that he'd know him as his property wherever he met him."

"There must be some secret enmity between the two men, which was not on the surface."

"So I thought, major, the moment the two met; but they both kept quiet if there was."

"I am sorry that the man who behaved so gallantly yesterday, turns out to be only a bar room fighter and gambler."

It was Florence Melton that spoke, and there was a vein of contempt in her tone.

"You mistake, Miss Melton; he is not such as you call him. He beheld four bullies, the most desperate devils in the City, draw on one man, Buckskin Ben, and he stepped forward and demanded fair play, and this brought the trouble on his shoulders."

"And his staking his life on a game of cards?"

"Ah! that he gambles I do not deny, and for stakes I confess I never saw gambled for before, I must admit; but then, Miss Melton, you know, all of us frontiersmen will play cards—even your father doubtless fingers the 'papers' at times, I guess."

"I cannot deny it, judge. What may appear as a crime in the States, is here only a pastime, you know. Florence, you are severe on Mr. Tarleton, whom I certainly think we owe much to, and a more elegant gentleman, though somewhat of a dandy in dress, I never met. By the way, judge, did he give any explanation of his fainting at sight of Miss Markham?"

Florence Melton leaned forward as if anxious to hear the reply.

"None, sir; that is, he merely said she is the image of one he knew to be dead, and whom he loved dearly, and the shock overcame him."

"Where is he, now?" asked Florence, with indifferent manner.

"He bought a fine horse, I had on my hands for sale, and rode away down the valley. I suppose he has gone to claim the Deadman's Mine."

"Alone?" and the manner of Florence Melton was not so indifferent.

"Oh, yes; he does not know what it is to fear

and if Colonel Darke is wise he will yield it without trouble, for Dead Shot is no man to stand trifling; but, major, I have found you a home that I think will suit you. It is the best place in town, by far, and was built by the first owner of the Grizzly Mine. It is, however, just out of the edge of the town, yet is perhaps the better for that."

"Will the owner sell, or rent?"

"Either; and it can be bought at a bargain, as the present owner lives in Denver, where he has a store. It is the fat old man who came over in the extra yesterday, and is sick this morning from the fright he received. His business here was to sell this place."

"I will see him and strike a bargain for the place, for I desire my daughter to have a quiet and pleasant home while we live here, and I thank you for your kindness; but I am really troubled at what you tell me about this foolish girl. I would have gone and looked the young miner up for her. I hope no harm will befall her."

"I hope not, indeed, sir, for her sadly beautiful face has quite won my heart. But you wished a horse to ride out to your mine—will you go, as you intended, or wait a day or two for the snow to get away?"

"I will wait, I think, before going to the mine, as my head feels a little sore from my wound; but I will, after awhile, get you to go with me to look at this house you speak of, for I wish to get settled as soon as possible. Ah, judge, you have a good cook; that steak is done to a turn, and the omelet is perfect, while I get the pure aroma of Java from the spout of that coffee-pot," and the major, who was an epicure, smiled with hungry anticipation as the Chinese waiter placed the breakfast upon the table, saying complacently:

"Muchoe goode eat for Melican man."

"Yes, these Heathen Chiuee, as we call them, are good cooks, and they make good servants as well. That fellow, Swing Soup; my cook, Gin Sling; and my office-man Sling Rum, will all live on what would not keep a white child alive. I have a dozen Celestials about the hotel and they are no trouble to me whatever; but, what in the name of all the saints is that row?"

As Judge Wolf spoke he ran hastily to the window and gazed out into the street, and almost an oath came to his lips as he saw the cause of the cries that had attracted his attention.

"What is it, judge?" asked Major Melton, who had followed him, and saw a somewhat noisy crowd congregated outside.

"What is it? Why, simply that the dead are alive!"

"I do not understand."

"Do you see those four large men, all dressed alike, looking alike, and the center of the crowd?"

"Yes, I see them distinctly; they are four remarkably evil-looking men, who seem to allow their beard and hair to grow to hide the faces of cutthroats," said Major Melton, quietly.

"You have hit them: *those four men are the Angel Quartette.*"

"Nonsense! you told me that Tarleton killed two of them."

"And so he did, or I thought so, for the bullets hit them square in the forehead, and were cut out by a miner present with his bowie-knife."

"Then how could they be alive?"

"That is the question. I saw two of them killed, and now the four stand there, apparently enjoying good health. This is marvelous."

"It is indeed. The wounds were not fatal; the bullets ran round the skull."

"So it would seem; but see, the crowd are as much puzzled to see them as I am, and they stand there apparently enjoying the greater notoriety they have won."

"And here comes Mr. Tarleton!"

It was Florence that spoke, and the eyes of the three fell upon the Gold Bullet Sport.

He was mounted upon his new purchase, a superb blood bay horse, handsomely saddled and bridled, and he rode with the grace and confidence of a splendid horseman.

That he saw the Angel Quartette was evident; but his face never changed a muscle, while he smiled and raised his broad-brimmed hat as he caught sight of the judge and his guests at the window.

The next instant he dismounted within five paces of the Angel Quartette, and a servant led his horse away.

CHAPTER XI.

SLIM IKE IN LUCK.

THOUGH Dead Shot had so suddenly become famous in Central City, there were some persons who had not seen him, and one of these was Slim Ike.

Hence he did not know the Gold Bullet Sport, when he entered the cabin of Hugh Lambert, a gold-mounted revolver in his hand.

"Ha! there has been foul play here, as I expected, for this is the man I saw ride away from the hotel with her. I fear he is dead," and Tarleton bent over the prostrate form.

Slim Ike heard the words, and setting the

visitor down as no enemy, at once arose to a sitting posture.

"You is correct, pard; I ain't dead, tho' tain't ther fault o' Capt'm Satan an' his ger-loots."

"Captain Satan! has he been here then?"

"He hev—I kin gamble on it."

"And the lady you guided hither from the hotel?" quickly asked Dead Shot.

"I hain't good at conundrums, pard; I don't know whar she be at this present minit."

"She is then with Captain Satan, for I can believe nothing else."

"She are. He came in heur on us; an' one o' his durned gang jist pulled on me from yonder corner—yer see ther hole thar. Well, I tumbled, an' thar I laid, list'nin' to a leetle intelligent discourse between Satin an' ther angil, an' then he tol her she had ter go with him, an' she guessed as how she'd better, seein' as how she c'u'dn't do nothin' else; then ther bloody varmints jist robbed me o' my possessions, a plug o' terbacee, with several chaws bit off, a flask o' benzine, that will pizen ther feller as drinks it, a million in gold dust, an' my weepins, not ter speak o' my animile I rid heur."

Dead Shot listened attentively to what Slim Ike had said, and then, by a few questions, learned all that had occurred.

"Now, my friend, I take you to be an honest fellow, and a good scout, as you look like a hunter."

"That are my biz, pard; but who mout you be?"

"My name is Tarleton, and I came to Central City to attend to some little matters I have on hand."

"Oho! you is ther Dead Shot, or I are a liar."

"That is what you call me here. Now, as you know me, perhaps you may be willing to serve me?"

"I'll do it. I like yer looks, pard—a leetle too fine feathers, it may be, but yer're lightnin' on ther shoot, I l'arn."

That was without a doubt a compliment of the highest order from Slim Ike.

"I heard the judge at the hotel say you could be depended on, and I intend to try you. I will pay you double what you can make at hunting each month, and engage you from today; but mind you, no one must know that you are serving me."

"I understand, pard. Perceed with yer sweet talk."

"I wish you to take the trail of Captain Satan—"

"Whew!"

"What is it?"

"I smell a mice; you is arter him like hot rock."

"I wish to rescue the lady from his power, and if you aid me, as I believe you will, I will make you a rich man."

"I'm yer meat every time, pard. Now I are list'nin'"

"Strike the trail of Captain Satan—in this snow you can easily follow him—and find out where he takes the lady; then come to the Central City House and let me know."

"I'll do it, pard; but I hain't got no weepins, as them durned Knights jist stripped me o' those precious tools."

"I will divide with you, and—Hark!"

A heavy tramp in the crisp snow was heard, and the next instant a horseman rode up to the cabin.

"It are one o' ther Knights, tho' he hain't his mask on now," whispered Slim Ike, eagerly.

In an instant Dead Shot sprung forward and called out in ringing tones:

"Halt! or you are a dead man!"

The horseman was well mounted and at once turned to fly, but there rung out a sharp report, and he tumbled heavily from the saddle, while, with wonderful speed, Tarleton ran forward and seized his horse ere he could get away.

"Now you are mounted and armed, my friend, and as turn about is fair play, you can search this gentleman's pockets," and Dead Shot turned the man over with his foot.

He was a villainous-looking fellow, dark-browed, heavily-bearded, and well-dressed, while he carried three revolvers and a long knife.

"Pard, yer is suddint death with ther shootin'-irons, you bet, an' I'm obligeed ter yer fer yer gin'rous present. I'll jist s'arch him as 'tentively as a parson does ther Scriptur's. See heur, this are his red mask, an' heur are his gold dust, an' it ain't no shakes nuther. Jeehosephat King! ef, heur ain't my leetle bag o' duckits he tuk from me!" and Slim Ike continued his search until he drew forth a pack of cards.

"Jerusha Jane! heur are ther devil's Bible, an' it looks as tho' he'd been a very 'tentive reader o' it. Now, pard, what shell I do with ther stiff?"

"Throw it yonder over the precipice. Now, my man, you are well mounted and armed, so get off on the trail as soon as possible. You will find me, as I told you, at Judge Wolf's," and Dead Shot went behind a huge snow-covered boulder, where he had left his own steed, mounted, and rode back in the direction of Central City, while Slim Ike, delighted at the lucky turn in his affairs, threw himself across the

horse of the dead Knight, and struck off on the trail of Captain Satan, which was plainly marked through the deep snow.

As rapidly as possible Dead Shot retraced his trail to town, and, on the way, stopped at the Deadman's Mine, the entrance to which was in a clump of pines on the side of a steep hill.

A rather comfortable and substantial log-cabin stood near the mine, with a shelter in the rear that served as a stable.

The approach to both the mine and the cabin was across an open space, and it would seem that the bad name borne by the place, had caused its last owner to almost fortify himself there—at least so it looked to Dead Shot as he sat on his horse gazing around him.

From the chimney of the cabin a column of blue smoke curled upward, and Dead Shot rode forward to see if the colonel was at home.

"Hold on, pard! Ther colonel's away from hum, an' I've orders not ter let strangers crowd ther mourners in his absence," and a man, in miner's costume, appeared in the doorway of the cabin, holding a rifle in his hand.

But, like a flash, Tarleton covered him with his revolver ere he could make a motion to raise his rifle.

"Drop that rifle, sir!"

"Pard, yer is too many fer me; I throws up my hand," said the man, with the philosophical resignation of the Western borderman when he sees that his adversary has the "drop" on him.

"I mean you no harm. I came to see Colonel Darke," and still covering the man, Dead Shot rode up to the cabin door.

"He are not at hum, stranger, an' I guesses as he'll weep when he comes back and I tells him how he missed seein' of yer."

"When did he leave here?"

"He hain't bin heur sin' yis'day af' noon."

"Very well; when he comes tell him that Dead Shot gave him a call, and that I will come in three days to take possession of Deadman's Mine."

"Yer has bought it, then, has yer, stranger?"

"No, I won it," and without another word Tarleton rode away; but a glance in the open door of the cabin showed him that Colonel Darke had exceedingly comfortable quarters, for that wild country.

Half an hour later Dead Shot rode up to the Central City House, and apparently unnoticed the Angel Quartette, entered the hotel, where he was met by Judge Wolf, who asked, excitedly:

"Did you see them?"

"Who, judge?"

"The Angel Quartette."

"Oh, yes."

"You did not kill them, then, as was believed?"

"Only two of them, judge."

"None of them—the bullets glanced, only stunning them."

Dead Shot smiled, and said pleasantly:

"They will doubtless be at the X. 10. U. 8. Saloon to-night."

"Of course, and I am confident they are dogging your steps."

"So be it; they shall have all the sport they wish. I shall have to favor the King and Queen next."

"You will not go there to-night, Tarleton?"

"Certainly, Judge Wolf. I never shun any man; but I have news for you—Miss Markham has been captured by Captain Satan."

"In God's name, no!"

"Yes," and Tarleton told of his discovery at the cabin, and added:

"It is my determination to run this game to cover, and I wish you would have the hunter, Buckskin Ben, looked up, and send him to my room; also, judge, I would like two good men in town, whom you can wholly depend on for any service—can you find me such?"

"Without trouble. Dick of Denver, who is a dashing young fellow, brave as a lion, and Tennessee Pete, his partner, are just the men you wish for dangerous work, and it will be no child's play to get the girl from the hands of Captain Satan. It seems to me you had better raise a company of men and attack the Knights."

"No, I can do more with a few good men than a hundred bad ones. Now I will get some dinner, for my ride has made me hungry. I suppose you will go with me to the X. 10. U. 8. to-night?"

"Oh, yes, if you will go."

"I must; I would not disappoint the Angels on any account," and with one of his peculiar smiles, Dead Shot entered the dining-room, where Swing Soup rushed forward to wait upon him, for he had not forgotten a certain golden souvenir of the morning, when he attended the Gold Bullet Sport.

CHAPTER XII.

DEAD SHOT'S ALLIES.

AFTER a hearty meal, cooked in Gin Sling's best style, and served by Swing Soup with a broad grin, Dead Shot went to his room, and unlocking his trunk began to look over his arms—a repeating rifle, gold-mounted, half a dozen splendid revolvers, a long, narrow-bladed Mexi-

can knife, and a bowie. He also had four small Derringer pistols which he always carried in his pockets, convenient to his grasp in an instant.

All of his arms were of the very best manufacture, heavily gold-mounted, and the bullets were of solid gold; he evidently did not intend throwing shots away, and anything or anybody worth shooting, was fully prized by him as of the value of one of his precious bullets.

In a short while his armory was in perfect order, and then he began slowly to pace the floor, his eyes filled with an intense look of sadness, and his lips firmly compressed.

"Well, this is the beginning of the end, and I have commenced well; so may I continue!"

"But, great God! how her face startled me, coming back as it did from the dead! No, no; it is only a wonderful resemblance—it is not, it cannot be she!"

"Yet, be she whom she may, I will not leave her in his power, and I must begin work at once.

"I wonder if he is deceived by the likeness as well as myself?"

"It may be, it must be—but who is she if not—oh, God! I dare not speak the name."

"The Indian can tell me more; he will know if it is she. Come in!"

The door slowly opened, and Dead Shot stood ready to meet friend or foe, his revolver in hand; but he replaced the weapon in his belt as Buckskin Ben entered.

"Come in, my friend, and be seated, for I wish a little talk with you."

"I'm at yer service, Dead Shot. Ther judge told me yer was wishin' ter see me," and Buckskin Ben threw himself into a chair.

"Yes, and I will tell you what I wish. I came here to settle an old score, and expected but one person to aid me; but I find I will have more enemies than I thought, and I need a few secret friends upon whom I can rely, and I have taken a fancy to you."

"It are mootial, pard; you can gamble on me. Yer helped me out a muss last night when I knows I'd be'n wiped clean out; but I'd died cl'ar grit, tho'. But, yer was lettin' loose yer tongue tackle."

"Yes, I was about to ask you, if your business here would prevent your joining hands with me?"

"Dead Shot, I hain't got no biz heur. I looks arter pelts when I is in my own kentry; but I just struck a lead—tumbled inter a gold-bucket in ther mountains, one day, when I war huntin' b'ar, an' I just run'd up heur ter hev a leetle sport all to myself. Chip in, pard, fer I is with yer, skulp an' toe-nail."

"Captain Satan has a band of some score or more men."

"Yer wiped out seveereal of them, yer did."

"Yes, but he has fully a score left, and their retreat is in the neighborhood of Guy's mountain, or Devil's Gate, and they are doubtless well prepared to protect themselves."

"They is fools if they isn't."

"Well, it is to this retreat that he has taken the lady, Miss Markham."

"Do yer say, pard, has he got the pretty gal? Do yer mean it?"

"He has. She foolishly went to a miner's cabin in the mountains, and with only one guide, and Captain Satan captured her there, wounding her companion; but he is now on the trail of the Knights and I expect him back soon with information; then we can act."

"I'm with yer; but we'll not tackle them alone?"

"No; Judge Wolf is to send me two more men, and these, with ourselves, Slim Ike, and one whom I expect to arrive to-day, will make six of us—enough for the work."

"You lead, Dead Shot, an' I hain't skeered."

"Thank you! Come in!" and Dead Shot again stood on the defensive; it was evident that he knew his life was in constant danger.

The door swung open, and in stepped two men—men in the true sense of the word, as far as their fine physique, bold and resolute faces were concerned.

They were in the regular miner's costume, red woolen shirt, top boots, rough pants, slouch hat, and belt of arms; and though reckless-looking, yet their faces were not evil.

Behind them came Judge Wolf, who said, pleasantly:

"Tarleton, here are the gentlemen I spoke of. This is Tennessee Pete, who you remember last night extracted your gold bullets from the heads of the Ace and Jack. He says they went clean through to the back of the skull."

"I knew that, judge. I am glad to meet you, my friend," and Dead Shot grasped the hand of Tennessee Pete.

"And this is Dick of Denver, Tarleton; a young man you can depend on every time, as you can also upon Peter, though he will drink a little too much sometimes."

Dick of Denver also grasped the hand of Dead Shot—a tall, handsome young miner, who looked as though he enjoyed every moment of life.

"Now, jedge yer needn't gi'n me away. I does like p'izen, I'm free ter sw'ar, an' I pours it down quite peert, sometimes; but I hain't bin r'ally drunk sin' I left Tennessee, nigh on ter

nine years ago, now. There I was l'arn't a lesson I'll never forgit."

"As how, Pete?" asked the judge, with a smile.

"Waal, yer see, judge, I are a married man, an' I had a pard as I us'd ter browse with, an' we'd sometimes tackle too much tanglefoot, an' then thar was blazes ter pay in ther bosom o' our fam'lies."

"One night, now nine years ago this comin' Fourth o' July, Buck Townsend an' myself rastled with corn-juice until it got us upside down, an' at night we started fer home; but durned ef we known which house was which when we got thar, an' argifyin' ther matter didn't do no good—so I just called out ter ther shemale o' ther she, bang ter come down an' pick her husban' out, bein' as we didn't know, an' judged ther ole lady w'u'd."

"An' we warn't mistook, kase she comed down, along in comp'ny with a broom-han'le, of which she had broke ther sweepin' part off, an' in less time than a creditor kin present a bill, I foun' out just who lived at that lay-out, an' so did Buck Townsend, too, kase he got Hail Columbey played on his head, seein' as how 'twas ther Fourth o' July, an' he struck fer hum, while ther ole lady struck fer me, an' hit dead center every time."

"Waal, I was h'isted up-sta'rs with that broomstick, an' I just tell yer it war int'restin' while it lasted, kase the old woman's mad war up, an' she just let out steam on me until I played I war dead."

"Then she lowed she'd fotch me 'round, an' went down-sta'rs an' I heerd her go out inter ther back-yard, an' I knowed her biz thar; she war gettin' peach-switches, an' thar was a good growth o' them; seein' as how we had no kids. Now I just levanted out o' that house kinder sudint-like, an' I hain't bin back sin', tho' I hev wrote ther ole woman an' sent her lots o' gold-dust ter keep her in good-humor; fearin' as how she mout wisit these heur diggin's; but I hain't bin dead drunk sin' that night, gents, an' every Fourth o' July, when I goes ter sleep, I dreams o' ther time when ther ole woman showed me which war which. Yas, pard, I do love benzine, but I don't git drunk."

Laughing at Tennessee's story, Judge Wolf left the room, and in a few words Dead Shot made known his intentions—to rescue Violet Markham from the power of Captain Satan, and also to capture or kill the entire band of the Knights of the Overland.

"You know," he continued, "that there is a large reward for the head of Captain Satan, dead or alive, and a fair sum for each one of his band, and this money falls to you five, for that will be the number I have with me, not counting myself, and I have reason to know that the Chief of the Road-agents has a large booty secreted at his retreat, which will also go to you."

"When will yer set in, boss?" asked Tennessee Pete.

"That will depend on circumstances. I wish you to keep your eye upon my movements without appearing to do so, and I will give you notice when to be ready, and you must have horses and your weapons on hand for instant use. To-night I go to the X. 10. U. 8. Saloon, and I wish you all to be there—What is it, Sling Rum?"

The Chinese addressed, at that moment put his head in at the door.

"Melican Injun man wantee see Gold Bullet Sportee."

"Good! It is the one I expected. Show him up, Sling Rum, and bring liquors for these gentlemen."

"Me doee so all samee," and the Celestial disappeared, and soon returned, bearing a waiter of glasses and several bottles.

Behind him came an Indian, whose appearance and costume proclaimed him to be a Cheyenne chief.

With a glad grunt of welcome he seized the hand of Dead shot, while he said, in fair English:

"Red Snake much glad see chief soon bimeby."

"And I am glad to see the Red Snake; he is welcome. Gentlemen, this is the Cheyenne chief, Red Snake—a true man, and one who loves his friends as he hates his foes. I owe him my life."

"Red Snake love chief. Red Snake dead many times if not for chief. He much brave pale-face—kill every time—Red Snake good Injun, you bet, much hunky."

The Indian spoke with a dignity that impressed his hearers with the truth of what he said, and Buckskin Ben remarked:

"You be a good red, I'll sw'ar; but I don't gin'rally tumble ter yer breed. Howsomever, heur's my claw, an' I'll stay by yer every time," and he offered his hand, which the Cheyenne grasped with a smile and a grunt.

"Put yer flipper thar, Injun! I'm glad ter make yer acquaintance," and Tennessee Pete stepped forward, as did also Dick of Denver, who, throwing off the frontier dialect and slang, as he did at times, said:

"The friend of Mr. Tarleton is my friend, be he white, red or black."

The door was now cautiously opened, and it peered the serious visage of Slim Ike.

"Well, what news?" and Dead Shot stepped toward him.

But Slim Ike was the quintessence of caution, and glancing around him, said:

"Shall I spit it out before these heur gerloots?"

"Yes."

"An' ther Injun?"

"Is my friend; he is Red Snake, a Cheyenne chief."

"Good! Injun, shake!" and Slim Ike held forth his hand, which the Cheyenne took, seemingly pleased at the attention shown him.

"Now let me surround a leetle p'izen, for I'm freezed clean through," and Slim Ike poured out a glass full of whisky and dashed it off.

"Now, capt'in, I went on ther trail ontill I comed ter whar it branched off inter a dozen dif'rent ways, an' bein' only myself I didn't tek but one—one as showed whar two hosses had gone along an' one ther gal's hoss. This led her Guy Mount'in in the direction o' Devil's Gate, an' that is all I diskivered, an' I comed back to let yer know."

"You did right. Now, my friends, help yourselves to liquor, and to-night be at Red Turner's saloon," said Dead Shot, and a moment after he was left alone with the Cheyenne chief.

CHAPTER XIII.

RED SNAKE GETS INTO TROUBLE.

It was verging on toward midnight when Dead Shot entered the X. 10. U. 8. Saloon, accompanied by Judge Wolf and Major Melton.

The saloon was crowded beyond precedent, for it was well known that the Angel Quartette were to be there, and that they "meant shoot" with the Gold Bullet Sport, and all in Central City were anxious to see what would be the termination of the affair, for, that Dead Shot would remain away none believed.

As though expecting the Gold Bullet Sport, Red Turner had reserved a table, which he at once motioned the judge and his friends to take, and it was so situated against the wall, that it fronted the crowd, and could not be easily flank'd.

Amid a silence, which fell upon the hitherto noisy crowd, Dead Shot and his party walked over and took seats, and brandy was called for and promptly served by Red Turner, who whispered cautiously, as he set it on the table:

"Be on yer guard, Sport, kase ther's bound ter be a b'ilin' heur ter-night."

Dead Shot smiled pleasantly, and glanced round the room, his eyes falling upon Slim Ike, Dick of Denver, Buckskin Ben, and Tennessee scattered here and there; but Red Snake, the Cheyenne, was not present.

"I wish Dan Smith was on hand to-night; but this is his night in Denver; he is every inch a man in an affray," said Judge Wolf, quietly.

"I would like him here, judge, yet I do not expect much trouble," returned Dead Shot.

"I see that two of that villainous-looking Quartette have their foreheads patched up with court-plaster," remarked Major Melton, glancing across the room to where the "Angels" sat at a table, drinking heavily and playing cards.

At this moment the door swung open and in stalked the Cheyenne, in all the dignity of his race.

Walking up to the bar he called for whisky, which Red Turner placed before him, and he poured out a drink large enough for a small family, and swallowed it without an effort.

"Good fire-water, good Injun; bad fire-water make bad Injun. Take more bimeby sometime, you bet," and instead of departing, as all believed he would, Red Snake looked around the room for a seat, and discovering a vacant chair at the table where sat the Angel Quartette, coolly walked over and took it.

"What does yer want heur, red?" yelled the King of the Quartette, in a voice that at once silenced the hum of conversation.

"Me good Injun—play poker, seven-up, every time, you bet—me hunky boy," was the calm reply, and a burst of laughter followed.

"Well, carry me hum ter die ef this don't beat all! Injun, does yer wish to jine this heur leetle game, or will yer play me single-handed, kase I'm yer honey?" and the King turned upon the chief with a look that meant mischief, as all could see.

"Me play pale-face every time—here dust," and Red Snake placed a bag of gold upon the table, which caused the eyes of the "Angels" to glitter avariciously.

"I'm yer pardner; what shall it be, red skin?"

"White man know—Injun got much dust."

"You hev, that's a fact; but I'll rake it all in in the shake o' a leetle lamb's tail. Heur's ther keerds."

"No; white man cards cheat—Injun good Injun, no cheat cards—play Injun cards," and Red Snake produced a pack, from some receptacle in his apparel, that seemed a good deal the worse for wear.

"Yer is a lyin' red, ef yer says I cheat; but I'll not git mad with yer. Them keerds hain't

wuth playin' with, tho', so less have a new pack."

The Cheyenne nodded assent, and Red Turner brought fresh cards, which were at once skillfully shuffled and dealt by the Indian, whose skill with the "pasteboards" surprised all who witnessed it, while it brought forth the remark from the Queen of the Angel Quartette that he'd "be durned ef that Injun wasn't a painted pale-face an' a gambler at that."

The stakes were named and the game began, and ended in Red Snake's winning the money; but before he could rake in his gold, it was seized by the King, who shouted out:

"Hold him, fellers, kase he cheated me, an' I'll knife him."

The Red Snake was a powerful man, but he was taken at a disadvantage, for his arms were seized upon either side by two of the Quartette, while a third held him around the waist.

"Hold him, boys, an' I'll jist skulp him, or I'm a liar," and the King started forward, knife in hand.

"Hold there!"

Every man in the room started at the sound of that ringing voice, that thrilled through them like a trumpet blowing the charge.

"Look out all, kase ther band's begun ter play," yelled Red Turner, and he stood ready to duck down behind his bar which was iron-plated inside, as he had known what to expect, as a man who dealt out "p'izen, benzine an' sich" in that wild land.

At the cry, the crowd divided right and left, leaving a lane open between where the Quartette stood—three of them still holding Red Snake, and the fourth revolver in hand—and Dead Shot.

The King now faced the Gold Bullet Sport, his revolver thrust forward, and a wicked gleam in his eyes, for he felt that he had the drop on his enemy now, for Dead Shot's left hand rested on his hip, and his right hung limp at his side, and apparently weaponless.

All saw the apparent advantage of the King, and trembled for Dead Shot, for the desperado was known to be a dangerous hand with the revolver and as quick as a flash.

"I guesses as how this are my time, stranger, ter pervide ther corpse for ther funeral. Yer chipped in too soon, an' afore yer was ready—I holds the drop on yer," said the bully.

The Gold Bullet Sport smiled serenely, and said calmly:

"I 'chipped in' because I would not see you rob and kill that red-skin who beat you at cards. If you hold the drop on me why don't you shoot?"

"I'm a-goin' ter. Say yer 'Now I lay me down ter sleep,' kase yer is ter be made cold meat of mighty suddint."

Had the King talked less and acted more, it would perhaps have been the better for him, for, quicker than a flash of lightning, the right arm of Dead Shot jerked backward and forward, and it was then seen that the hand had not been weaponless, for there was a *whiz* in the air and a *thud*, just as the revolver of the "Angel" flashed.

For a second none knew what had happened, and then they saw that the Gold Bullet Sport, with one mighty bound, had cleared the space between him and his foes, and held a revolver in each hand at the head of the Jack and Ace, while Red Snake did the same service for the Queen, and upon his back on the floor, stone dead, lay the King, the gold-hilted bowie of Dead Shot buried in his heart. The Gold Bullet Sport had hurled his knife as unerringly as he sent his bullets!

When the crowd saw how matters stood—that a shot had been fired, a knife had been thrown, and that the King of the Angel Quartette was dead, and the other three in durance vile, they broke forth in a yell of admiration that made the glasses on the bar ring again, while a voice was heard crying:

"You hev 'em now whar they live, Sport; shoot 'em, lynch 'em!"

But Dead Shot did not see fit to follow this advice, and simply said to the discomfited "Angels":

"Now get out of this, and take that carrion with you to feed to the crows."

He stood back as he spoke, yet still covering the three men, and Red Snake followed his example, while, seeing that the crowd were against them, the remaining Angels raised their dead comrade from the floor—Dick of Denver stepping forward and drawing the knife from his bosom, and handing it to Tarleton—and were leaving the saloon, when the Queen, shaking his fist back at his enemy, shouted:

"We'll drive ter yer funeral yit, my fine bird—I'll gamble on it."

"Done! come back and stake the money with Red Turner, here—" and Dead Shot walked to the bar, his purse in hand, while the Queen returned, and his comrades halted with the dead body at the door.

"I'll wager one thousand dollars that I kill you within the month—the one who wins to get the money from Red Turner," said Dead Shot, calmly.

"You shoots over my pile, pard."

"Five hundred, then"

"It are a bargain! Heur, Red Turner, is my dust, an' I'll call on yer afore long fer ther stakes, an' gi'n yer an invitation ter this gent's funeral. Gents, yer is all invited," and the butler smiled grimly, and bowed to the crowd.

"I'll be at ther funeral, pard, an' I guesses as how you'll ride in ther hearse," said Tennessee Pete.

The money was placed in the hands of Red Turner, and the "Angel trio" departed, Dead Shot soon after following, accompanied by Major Melton, and Judge Wolf.

As they parted at the bar of the hotel, over a friendly "night-cap," the Gold Bullet Sport said, feelingly:

"Do not consider me cruel and hardened, Major Melton, and you, Judge Wolf; but I have a score to settle with certain men that their lives alone can pay. Good-night!" and Dead Shot ascended to his room, leaving the judge and the major more than ever impressed in favor of the remarkable man they had known so short a time.

CHAPTER XIV.

CALAMITY KATE.

In a cabin on the outskirts of Central City, and standing off by itself, at the mouth of a rocky gulch, sat a woman, the night of the death of the King of the Angels at the X. 10. U. 8. Saloon.

She was dressed in a blue woolen skirt, red woolen jacket, and wore around her waist a leather belt, in which was stuck a revolver and knife.

The face of the woman was a strange one. Once it had been handsome, and even at forty-five it was not uncomely—dark, reckless and marked as it was by evil passions.

Her eyes were large, blue, except in anger, and then they became intensely black; her lips sensual, and the teeth perfect, while her form was supple, graceful, and had once been elegant.

Braids of sunburnt hair, once golden, encircled her head, and in the East she would have been mistaken for a Gipsy, but in Central City she was taken for just what she was—a woman who had seen better days, and had drifted to the mines with her husband, or lover.

A year before, she had appeared in Central City with a man, who, like herself, was a wreck, and whom she called her husband; but he, when drinking, denied the soft impeachment; at the same time hinting that she was the legal property of another man.

That he did not care for her was evident; that she idolized him was also evident, and when one day he was shot, in a bar-room broil, and his body carried home to her, she had taken the law into her own hands and killed the slayer of the one she so dearly loved.

For a week after the funeral the woman was not seen in Central City, and some miners, believing the "claim" deserted by her, went to working it, but they saw their mistake, when, with revolver in hand, she appeared upon the scene, looking like the ghost of her former self, and chased the two off of her possessions.

While they lay in bed nursing a wounded leg and arm, they had time to meditate upon the danger of "bouncing" a woman's claim.

From that day the woman, whom the miners had christened Calamity Kate, worked in her mine, getting a small sum out of it daily, and her little treasure she hoarded carefully up for some purpose known only to herself.

As she sat that night in her rude cabin, her thoughts seemed none of the pleasantest, if one might judge from the low words that fell from her lips, while her brow was dark and scowling.

"Oh! fool that I am, fool that I was! and this life must go on yet longer, ere I can return and see those whom my heart goes out to in all its yearning!"

"He is dead, perhaps; but *they* will not die until I see them again; and oh! what joy will it be to see them, even though I dare not tell them who I am."

"Oh, God! how I have suffered in all these years gone by—suffered, and yet live—suffered and yet am not mad."

"Well am I called *Calamity Kate!* but oh, how different this from the olden time; yet he was a fool to marry me, when I told him I did not love him; but I should not blame him, for he trusted me because he loved me, and I was false to him."

"And this is my punishment! Oh, how terrible it has been! When he lived, even though he had ceased to love me, I could bear it; but now, it is greater than I can bear."

"Sometimes I feel as though I could not wait to dig enough gold out of the stingy earth, but will take it at the muzzle of my revolver from those that have it—and why not?"

"Am I not already a murderer? What other crime need I fear to commit?"

"But, I would kill again if it would but get me gold to go from here and see—Hark! Yes, it is a step. Who comes?"

"It is I, Kate; open the door," said a voice without.

The woman arose and drew back the bolt, and a man with a cloak around him entered; it was Colonel Darke.

"Well, Kate, I have again appointed a meeting at your cabin; I will pay you well for it."

"Gold is what I want, Colonel Darke," said the woman, shortly.

"You see I do not care to be seen talking to the Angels in town, and I told them to meet me here to-night. I suppose you can give us the use of your cabin for a half hour or so?" and Darke placed in her hand a few pieces of gold.

"Yes, I will go down to the grocery for some stores, and then stop in to see Miner Wetmore's wife, who is sick. I will return by twelve;" and putting on a man's slouch hat and drawing a blanket around her shoulders, she left the cabin, the colonel, in the meantime, pacing the floor in deep thought.

"That woman could aid me greatly did I dare trust her. I will talk with her some time and see what dependence I can place in her. Now I wonder what those devils accomplished to-night—ha! there they come, now!"

Four distinct taps came upon the door and Colonel Darke opened it, and started back with an oath, as three men entered, bearing the form of a fourth in their arms.

"Curses! who have you there?"

"It are the King, colonel, an' no joking," answered the man known as the Queen.

"Is he dead?"

"He hain't dancin' happy, you kin bet. He war too much fer us, boss."

"The Dead Shot?"

"Thet are the feller I refer to—he are chain-lightnin' on ther rampage, an' yer never knows whar he is goin' to strike."

"Cowards! to let one man get the best of you!" sneered Colonel Darke.

"Look a-heur, colonel, he got away with you, an'—"

"I was one and you were four; but I expect I will have to kill him yet."

"It mout be, or have him call for your checks, colonel, an' ef he does, I guesses as how you'll cash in."

"Silence! Two last night and one to-night—this is bad, very bad; but you must be the Quartette again to-morrow."

"It are more healthy when that chap are loose in a pasture; does yer want us to tackle him ag'in?"

"Not immediately, for—"

"I can't wait, colonel, kase I have a leetle bet o' five hundred with him I'll get him yet whar he lives; but I'm not so howlin' happy over ther gamble as yer might think."

"Win your money and I'll give you a thousand. He left word at the mine to-day that he would take possession in three days; before that time he must be dead—do you understand?"

"Yas, colonel; but ef I lose ther bet?"

"Then the devil will get his own," rudely said Colonel Darke, and though the Queen's eyes flashed, he made no reply.

"When shall we tackle him ag'in, colonel?" asked the Queen, after a moment's silence.

"When you please—try him on the street next time if you wish; if you are afraid to face him, shoot him in the back."

"Jedge Lynch mout investigate—"

"No danger; hang about the streets to-morrow, and in some way kill him—how, I do not care, so that you do it. I tell you he is our most dangerous foe, and I have work on hand I do not wish him to meddle with. Now I am off for Golden City, and when I return I expect you to give me a good report. A thousand to the man who kills him!"

So saying Colonel Darke motioned to the Angels that the conference was at an end, and they took up the form of their comrade and left the cabin, he following a moment after, and mounting his horse that was in waiting, dashed rapidly away in the darkness.

As he disappeared, and the Angels were lost sight of in the gorge, a form crept from beneath the cabin, pushed open the door and entered; it was Calamity Kate.

"A pretty game to get rid of a brave man, my gay colonel; but one in which Calamity Kate shall hold a full hand—I have sinned enough in the past, now let me begin to do some good."

CHAPTER XV.

A RUINED MAN.

THE property which Judge Wolf had spoken of, as being a pleasant home for Major Melton, more than met that gentleman's hopes, and a purchase was at once made, the owner being most anxious to get back again safe in Denver, which place he mentally swore he would never more leave.

Eager to be at once settled, the major and Florence had been busy all day purchasing furniture, and had just returned to the hotel to supper, when up dashed the stage from Denver with Dan Smith upon the box.

"What news, Dan?" asked Judge Wolf anxiously.

"Passed over yesterday and back ter-day, 'ithout seein' a single Knight; but thar's some pilgrims inside, jedge, fer yer hash-house."

The judge opened the stage door and cut stepped several persons, one of whom in appearance was particularly striking—a tall, well-formed

man, dressed in the height of fashion, and with blonde mustache, long, curling golden hair, and blue eyes full of expression; a handsome man, and yet one in whose face there was a look not sincere.

Bowing politely to Judge Wolf, he said, in a voice strangely soft:

"You can give me pleasant quarters, I hope, sir, for the time I remain with you?"

"Certainly, sir; whom do I address?"

"My name is Kenyon, sir—Carl Kenyon; I am owner of the Grizzly Mine."

"Ah! I know you by name, Mr. Kenyon, but never had the pleasure of meeting you before. Major Melton, who purchased from you, and his daughter are now guests in the house?"

"It is to see Major Melton that I have come. Now I will go to my room, please," and the stranger followed Sling Rum to the chamber assigned to him.

As he ascended the stairs he met Dead Shot coming down, and the two slightly bowed, hesitated, and passed on, the stranger flushing slightly, the Gold Bullet Sport having an unfathomable look come into his fine eyes.

Going straight up to the register Dead Shot glanced at the new arrivals, and then turned away, seemingly puzzled.

"A note for you, Mr. Tarleton. When you have read it, I have something to show you," said the judge.

Dead Shot took the note and glanced at the address:

"To MR. TARLETON—OR

"Dead Shot, the Gold Bullet Sport."

"Central City House."

It was in a feminine hand and well written—the writing of a person of education.

Opening the envelope Dead Shot read without a change of expression:

"Sir:

"You have dangerous enemies in Colonel Darke and the four men known as the Angel Quartette—they plotted to take your life, last night at my cabin, by shooting you down on the street.

"Beware of them, for you are too brave a man to be shot down like a dog."

"You are a stranger to me, and yet I would serve you—but do not betray me, or my life would be the forfeit."

"CALAMITY KATE."

Dead Shot read the note twice over, and then tore it into little pieces.

"Judge, who is Calamity Kate?" he asked.

"A poor woman whom I deeply pity—one who has seen better days, and who came to the city with a worthless vagabond, who boasted that he had won her from her husband; there is some mystery as well as sorrow in her life. Why do you ask?"

"I may tell you some time; now, what was it you wished to show me?"

Without a word Judge Wolf led the way to the window and pointed out into the street. There, before the door, stood four men—the Angel Quartette.

"Those fellows never say die, do they?"

"Next time I shall have to kill them all and then bury them," and with a light laugh Dead Shot passed out into the street. His was a nature to meet any threatened danger at once, and have it over with.

As he left the hotel the stranger, Carl Kenyon, came down to the office and asked to see Major Melton.

"He is in his room, sir; the heathen will show you up. He knows of your arrival," said the judge; and a moment after Carl Kenyon stood in the presence of Major Melton and his beautiful daughter.

"Major Melton, I believe?" and Carl Kenyon advanced to meet the ex-officer.

"Yes, sir; I was told Mr. Kenyon desired to see me."

"My name is Kenyon, sir."

"Alas! a relative of the gentleman of whom I purchased the mine! Be seated, sir. My daughter, Mr. Kenyon."

The gentleman bowed politely, gave Florence a glance of unfeigned admiration, and a light but pleasant conversation followed, when, the maiden excusing herself, left the room, for she saw that the visitor evidently desired to see her father upon business.

"Major Melton, pardon a seeming rudeness, sir; but your daughter is very, very beautiful," and Mr. Kenyon spoke with an earnestness that proved that he meant what he said.

"She is the joy of my life, sir, and as good as she is beautiful; but are you the brother of Mr. Carl Kenyon, of whom I purchased the Grizzly Mine?"

"I am Carl Kenyon himself, sir!"

"Impossible!" and the major was intensely surprised.

"It is true, sir, my name is Carl Kenyon, and I came hither from San Francisco, as I learned that you had made a *supposed* purchase of my property, known as the Grizzly Mine."

"A *supposed* purchase? I must confess, sir, I am wholly unable to understand you. I paid fifty thousand dollars cash for that mine, and hold the deeds of transfer from Carl Kenyon as the legitimate owner," said the major, warmly.

"Major Melton, it pains me deeply, sir, to tell you that you have been grossly deceived—the man who sold you that mine had no right to do so."

"You astound me! Certainly there must be some mistake about it?"

"None, whatever, sir, I am sorry to say. I bought the Grizzly Mine a year and a half ago, for ten thousand cash, for it was in ill-favor then; but I put good miners there who struck lucky leads, and it has paid handsomely, under the management of Carleton Keene, my superintendent, whom I placed there."

"Finding that this agent, Carleton Keene, was cheating me, I discharged him several months ago, and the mine has since run itself, under a boss miner; but you can imagine my surprise and anger when I was told that Major Melton, an ex-army officer, had purchased the property for a large sum from one pretending to be myself."

"Great God! if what you tell me is true, I am utterly ruined—utterly wrecked, financially. I paid out fifty thousand cash, and since coming here have purchased a house and furnished it; this has swamped me, excepting a few hundred dollars; but I expected daily receipts from the mine and made no provisions for a rainy day."

"Now you come here and coolly inform me that the purchase of the mine was a bogus transaction. It is a sad reality to me, sir."

"I know it, Major Melton, and I deeply feel for you, sir," said Carl Kenyon, feelingly.

"And where is this Carleton Keene, who assumed your name?"

"He is dead, sir; he killed himself in San Francisco, a short while since, in a gambling hell."

"But of course I can recover my money," and the major was very pale, though calm.

"Unfortunately no—he lost every dollar at the gambling-table. It was this that caused him to take his own life."

"I am ruined—my every hope is gone—my poor, poor daughter," groaned the unhappy man.

"Major Melton, from my heart I feel for you, sir, and—pardon me for the suggestion—if it is as bad as you say, I can certainly keep you from want, for the mine needs a manager, and though the salary is not large, it at least will prevent starvation. Pardon me if I wound you."

"On the contrary, Mr. Kenyon, I thank you for your kindness; but, let me collect my ideas, sir; when did this man die?"

"Some three weeks since. He lived a few hours after shooting himself, and confessed all to me."

"Yes, he came to the fort, where I was visiting a brother officer, and offered the mine for sale, and the representations he made were so fair that I wrote to Judge Wolf, the proprietor of this hotel, and whose name was given me as a responsible party, and was told by him in a letter that the mine was owned by Carl Kenyon, who had purchased it a year and a half before, and that it was paying largely.

"I instantly closed the bargain, and came down here soon after. Now you tell me the man was not Carl Kenyon, but a Carleton Keene."

"True, sir; allow me to summon Judge Wolf—he can tell you something of the man, I suppose."

Five minutes after the proprietor of the Central City House entered the room.

"Judge, I am sorry to trouble you; but, did you know Carleton Keene?" asked the major, calmly.

"Quite well, sir; he was often at my house."

"Describe him, please."

"A man of thirty-five, with dark face, no beard and brown hair—about five feet ten inches, I should say, and with pleasant manners."

"The very man! What position did he hold in the Grizzly Mine?"

"That of manager, I had heard, for the owner, Mr. Kenyon."

"One more question—when did he leave Central City?"

"Some three months since, sir; and on business East, I believe he told me."

"I thank you, judge."

Judge Wolf bowed and departed, and Major Melton buried his face in his hands, while he said, bitterly:

"How terribly I have been deceived; I am a ruined man."

"Not so bad as that, I hope, major; but, Carleton Keene had every facility to deceive you. He had, as manager, the plans of the mines, and different claims attached to it, and its whole history, and as he bought it for me, he of course knew far more about it than I did, for I have never seen it, or been in Central City before today; but, major, there are miners here who know me, having worked for me in California, years ago, and they can identify me, or you can write to parties of responsibility in San Francisco, and ask—"

"My dear sir, you mistake me; I am not the man to doubt one who comes and makes a plain statement to me. This man represented himself as Carl Kenyon, the owner of the mine, and the judge bears testimony with you that he was only the manager. I have been deceived, sir, defrauded, and ruined; but I will bear it as best I can."

"You are brave, sir, and you have my sym-

pathy. I will visit the mine, see what it is worth, and its possibilities, and then make you an offer as manager, and none need know for the present that you are not the owner."

"You are most generous, sir."

"No, only just; for the present do not speak to your daughter upon the matter. Good-afternoon, Major Melton," and Carl Kenyon left the unhappy man alone with his thoughts.

CHAPTER XVI.

A RUNNING FIGHT.

WHEN Dead Shot went out into the street, he fully expected an attack upon him from the Angel Quartette; but undauntedly he passed right by them, his eyes falling searchingly upon each of the four faces, and yet they made no motion to draw their weapons. Perhaps the sight of Buckskin Ben, Dan Smith and Red Snake standing near, added to their wholesome fear of the Gold Bullet Sport, prevented their indulging their desire for a street fight.

Seeing that they did not then mean mischief, Dead Shot again repassed where they stood, entered the hotel, and soon after came out and mounted his horse, which a servant brought round for him.

"When will you return, Tarleton?"

"Can't tell exactly, judge; good-afternoon," and Dead Shot cantered down the street pleasantly, smoking a cigar, and looking as though he had no dread of any danger near him.

As he rode away from the hotel, a fair face at the window was watching him; it was that of Florence Melton.

What was her motive she could not tell, but there suddenly came over her a desire to take a short gallop upon horseback. It was a pleasant afternoon, a little muddy with the melting snow but no longer very cold, and she summoned the chambermaid, ordered a horse, and attired in a most becoming habit, was soon lifted to the saddle by the polite Judge Wolf.

"Don't venture out of town, Miss Melton," he said, as a warning.

"Not far, judge; only to have a look at the town from the hills," and the maiden dashed away, taking the direction in which Dead Shot had gone fifteen minutes before.

"He certainly cannot suspect me of following him; yet I am doing so, I blush to confess, even to myself, for, in spite of his red record, that man holds a strange fascination for me."

Coming to two roads, leading one down the valley, the other toward the mountains, Florence was at a loss which to take; but after a moment's hesitation, she rode off toward the hills, and soon disappeared in the pines that covered the slopes, and fringed the canyons.

Hardly had her form been lost sight of in the timber, when four horsemen dashed rapidly along the road, halted an instant at the forks, and then continued on after the maiden.

When Dead Shot left the hotel he rode rapidly along until he drew rein at the cabin of the Deadman's Mine.

"Has Colonel Darke returned yet?" he asked of the same man he had before seen there.

"He hain't; guesses as how he's layin' low until his year gits healed, seein' as how yer bored it fer year-rings. Ther boys tell me as seen ther borin' ther yer shoots gold bullets, stranger," and the man looked admiringly at Dead Shot.

"Yes: tell the colonel I wish to get possession of this mine—that I won it fairly, and I will not stand trifling. You doubtless know where he is, so give him my message?"

"I will when I sees him, stranger. 'Pears ter me I'd like ter hev some o' those gold bulletts yer shoot."

"I will leave one for the colonel, that he may not doubt my having been here. I see his picture yonder," and Dead Shot pointed through the open door, to where hung, above the chimney-piece, a large photograph of Colonel Darke, and which had been taken a few days before in Central City, and was framed with a thin circle of beaten gold from his mine.

As quick as a flash the Gold Bullet Sport raised his revolver and fired, and the costly ball imbedded itself in the stout log behind the picture, having passed through the very center of the head of the likeness.

"Holy Snakes! Pard, that lays over anything I ever see. Come ag'in ter-morrer an' see us. I likes ter hev yer 'round."

With a light laugh, Dead Shot shoved another load into his revolver and galloped away.

At the cross-roads a form was standing apparently awaiting him, and as he would have gone on by, signaled to him to halt.

Dead Shot did so, surprised at the strange looking creature before him. It was Calamity Kate.

"Pard," she began, hastily, assuming the dialect of the mines—"pard, I see yer ride this way, an' I see'd a young lady from ther hotel do the same. Yer knows best as ter whether she was arter yerse'f; but she tuk that road ter ther mount'ins, an' she war alone, an' shortly arter ther Angel Quartette follered on her trail—or on yours. I are Calamity Kate, an' now yer knows all I kin tell yer."

"How long since they passed?" asked Dead Shot, quickly.

"Ther gal ha'f a hour ago, ther Angils 'bout a'f as long."

"I thank you. I will see you again," and the spurs sunk deep into the blooded bay, causing him to snort with pain and terror as he bounded away like the wind.

Into the shadow of the pines rushed the steed, and up the steep slope, unmindful of the bad road, until he came to where the way led around a ragged spur. Here Dead Shot suddenly beheld the Angel Quartette before him—three of them ranged across his path, standing behind their horses, their revolvers leveled over their saddles!

The fourth was riding rapidly on up the road, leading a horse by the bridle. It was the steed of Florence Melton, and she was in the saddle!

Dropping his reins upon the neck of his horse, and with a revolver in each hand, Dead Shot went straight at the barrier, firing as he rode, and was met by answering shots from the three Angels.

But down went the center steed, and the rider followed in a second; then another horseman fell, and Dead Shot swept on, his own steed bleeding from two wounds in the neck, though slight ones, and the brave man himself thrice struck!

But he seemed not to feel his own injuries, and urged his horse on with tremendous bounds in pursuit, and a yell of joy broke from his lips as he saw that he was rapidly gaining.

A few moments more and the Angel felt that he must relinquish his prize to save himself, or turn and fight for her.

But a glance over his shoulder had shown him that his three comrades had failed to check the onward rush of the Gold Bullet Sport, and that two of them had fallen, and he knew the unerring aim of the man who pursued him too well to believe that they yet lived.

Hence he determined to let the maiden go—to get ransom from her father was all that they had captured her for—and to look out for himself.

But he decided a trifle too late, for, as he spurred on ahead of the horse ridden by Florence, there came a sharp report, and his own steed sprung into the air, swayed badly, stumbled and fell heavily, hurling his rider far over his head.

But the man, active as a panther, caught on his hands and feet, and was up in an instant, confronting his enemy, his revolver's thrust forward, and rattling off lively and dangerous music as Dead Shot came on.

"Now for them stakes, pard!" he yelled, with desperation, when brought to bay.

It was the Queen of the Quartette of Angels, and it seemed as if luck was on his side, to win the money in the hands of Red Turner, for, a well-aimed shot brought the blood-bay down on his knees, and another tumbled him over, dead.

But Dead Shot seemed prepared for just such a *contretemps*, and alighted upon his feet, his revolver flashing as he touched the ground, and with fatal effect, for the Queen leaped into the air and fell dead, shot through the heart!

But the victor had no time to rejoice over the vanquished, for there came the rapid clatter of hoofs, and around the bend of the road rushed a horseman, digging his knife down into the back of his straining steed to urge him on at greater speed.

It was the last of the Quartette, flying for his life, for behind him were heard the hoof-beats of pursuing horsemen.

At the sight of Dead Shot in his path, the man attempted to turn up the steep slope; but he was too late—the quick eye of the Sport had already glanced along his revolver, and the Angel tumbled from his steed, which was caught by Tarleton, just as five horsemen rode up and drew rein.

The party were the friends and allies of Dead Shot, and Red Snake was in advance.

"Waal, I'll declar'—ther whole Quartette wiped clean out! Glee-oh-rious! what a funeral we'll hev!" and Buckskin Ben sprung to the side of Dead Shot, who was quietly reloading his revolver, while into the midst of the little party rode Florence, her hair hanging down upon the back of her horse, her face pale, but her eyes lashing fire.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RED MASKS.

"MR. TARLETON, I congratulate you," and Dick of Denver advanced toward Dead Shot, his hand extended, but before the latter could reply Florence Melton sprung to the ground, and, her long habit trailing in the snow and slush, walked straight up to him.

"Mr. Tarleton," and her voice trembled, "once again I owe you my heartfelt gratitude. Before, you saved my father and myself from robbery, perhaps from worse, and now you have served me in a way that no words of mine can ever repay you for. I was foolish to ride so far from the town, and thus endanger your life."

Dead Shot's face flushed slightly, as he saw that it was his danger she thought of more than her own; but he said, quietly:

"I am glad to have been of service to you,

Miss Melton, and in serving you I have done the country a favor—removed four of its greatest curses."

"Whisky and turnips! Pards, see heur!" cried Slim Ike, who was attentively investigating the wardrobe of the dead Queen, and as he spoke he held to view a *red mask*.

"Two false face—moro bimeby, every time," said the Cheyenne, and he found another red mask upon the second Angel.

"That means that they belonged to Captain Satan's band," said Dick Denver.

"It does; you will find the same red masks upon the other two lying down the road," calmly remarked the Sport.

"Oh Heaven, I thank thee! Mr. Tarleton, from what havo you not saved me?" cried Florence Melton, the color again forsaking her face and leaving her deadly pale.

"But you are wounded! how thoughtless not to have asked you before," and her eyes turned earnestly upon him.

"Only three scratches, Miss Melton. If you will ride on with Dick of Denver, the Cheyenne will soon dress them for me, and we will overtake you ere you get to town."

As Dead Shot spoke he lifted the maiden lightly into her saddle, and Dick of Denver placing himself by her side, the two rode away together.

Throwing off his coat, Dead Shot showed three slight wounds, two through the fleshy part of the left arm, and the other a contusion, made by a well-aimed bullet striking an object just over his heart.

Removing this object, Buckskin Ben's quick eyes saw that it was a gold miniature, set with diamonds, and that the bullet was imbedded in the gold, and that the face was that of *Violet Markham*!

Here was more mystery, but the hunter said not a word, but aided the skillful Cheyenne in dressing the wounds which Dead Shot made light of.

"Boss, back yander I see'd two stiffs an' one hoss, an' heur is ther same; w'u'd yer tell me how many o' them gold bullets yer slung round loose at ther whole tea-party?" asked Tennessee Pete, who had been busy investigating the wounds of the Angels and their steeds.

"I fired six shots only," calmly replied Tarleton, with a smile.

"Thet's my calcilation; six shots an' six lumps o' game. Thet are prime, boss; yer never wastes yer pistol provender. Guesses as how I'll extract ther bullets."

"Then come on all of you, and bring the bodies of the Angels. As you pass the hotel I will join you, for I wish to tell you what to do with them. Now, Buckskin, if you will kindly transfer my saddle and bridle from my dead bay there, to the steed of the Queen, I will be obliged," and in five minutes more Dead Shot rode on after Dick of Denver and Florence Melton, passing the scene of his first conflict, with a mere glance at those who lay dead upon the roadside.

At the forks of the road, he came up with Dick of Denver and Florence. They had halted to speak to Calamity Kate, and the maiden was saying, earnestly:

"I owe, in a great measure, my rescue to you, I am told, for you sent Mr. Tarleton on after me, as well as his friends. Do come to see me, and let my father thank you. To-morrow we will be in our own house—yonder," and Florence pointed with her whip to the place her father had purchased.

"I have done enough evil in the world to now atone for it by a little good. My conscience thanks me more than your words can; but I will come and see you, for a talk with one as pure and beautiful as you are, will do me a world of good," and Calamity Kate turned shortly on her heel and walked away toward her cabin, a hundred paces distant, just as Dead Shot rode up and joined them.

"I'll ride on ahead now, captain," said Dick of Denver, and leaving Dead Shot as the escort of Florence, the young and handsome miner galloped rapidly on, just as twilight crept over the valley, leaving the hilltops yet bathed in a flood of sunlight.

For a moment neither Tarleton nor Florence spoke a word, and then the maiden said:

"Mr. Tarleton, do you know that you lead a very reckless and dangerous life?"

"Fate has forced it upon me. There is no evading one's destiny, Miss Melton," was the calm reply.

"Fate has certainly been most cruel to you."

"Far more than you can ever know, Miss Melton; I have been cursed by Fate."

The man spoke with so much bitterness, and his tones were so deep and strange, that Florence started; but, after a moment she added:

"Do not think me idly curious, but does the wild life you lead here serve to drown bitter memories?"

"Miss Melton, the bitter memories of my past can never be banished—they are before me by day and by night; but in the life I lead I am performing a stern duty; I am fulfilling a vow made to myself, and if my hand is turned with deadly intent against my fellow-men, it is because I have found them more cruel to me than

the red savage of the wilderness, or the wild beast of the prairie and mountain—it is because I have a wrong to wipe out—a wrong such as few men have suffered and lived—that I lead the life I do; but see, I fear that dashing Dick of Denver has made known what has occurred, for the people seem turning out *en masse* to receive us. I am sorry for your sake. Next time do not be so reckless as to venture out alone."

"I will obey you. I shall never forgive myself for the trouble I have caused you; but, Mr. Tarleton, let us be friends. We move to-morrow, and I wish you to come and see us, for papa will gladly welcome you."

"I will come, if you wish it," and the two drew rein before the hotel, where a wild shout of joy was raised, as Florence sprung into the arms of her father.

"Oh, my daughter, how could you?"

"Don't scold, papa; I know it was imprudent, and I have had a lesson; I will not be rash any more; but there is Mr. Tarleton, sir."

"Tarleton, when you know what it is to be wrapped up in one being, and see that one rescued from deadliest peril, you will know how to feel toward one who serves her, as I do toward you. I cannot say more now," and Major Melton's voice trembled as he grasped the hand of Dead Shot.

"Permit me to offer Miss Melton my warmest congratulations," said the soft voice of Carl Kenyon, and yet Florence shuddered as she took the proffered hand.

"Mr. Tarleton, Mr. Kenyon desires to be presented to you," said Judge Wolf.

Dead Shot merely bowed at the introduction, failing to see the half-extended hand of Carl Kenyon, who said pleasantly:

"I am glad to know Mr. Tarleton. His wonderful exploits are gaining him a great name throughout the country."

Dead Shot again merely bowed, and passed on to his room; it was evident that he did not like Carl Kenyon, or that he had some cause for wishing to avoid him. So thought the keen sighted Judge Wolf, and also Florence Melton, both of whom saw the angry flush upon the face of the man who had been treated so cavalierly by the Gold Bullet Sport.

In half an hour Dead Shot came down to the office of the hotel, dressed elegantly in a suit of gray cloth, but, as upon all occasions, wearing his pants in his boot-tops, and going as though prepared for the saddle, with spurs and riding whip.

"Judge, have the boys come in yet with the bodies of the Angels?" he asked, indifferently.

"Not yet, Tarleton."

"Then I shall have time to get some supper. Would you and the major like to go with me to the X. 10. U. 8. to get my money from Red Turner?"

"Yes, we both spoke of it, and so did Mr. Kenyon. By the way, Tarleton, have you any thing against that man?"

"Mr. Kenyon and myself have met before. One of these days I will refresh his memory as to when and where," was the quiet reply, as Dead Shot passed into the upper room.

Half an hour after, accompanied by the judge while Carl Kenyon went with Major Melton, Dead Shot set out for the X. 10. U. 8. Saloon whither his allies, with the dead "Angels," already had preceded them.

Upon entering, the crowd arose as by common consent, and gave three cheers for the Gold Bullet Sport, who, in response, made one of the shortest and best speeches on record; he said:

"Gentlemen, step up and take a drink!"

Then, turning to Red Turner, he continued:

"Mr. Turner, the money I have won in my bet with the Queen of the departed Angel Quartette, I leave, with my own stake, in the hands of yourself, Judge Wolf, and Major Melton, to go as a fund to aid destitute and deserving miners in Central City; and the rewards offered for these four men, as members of the band of Captain Satan, known as the Knights of the Overland, I commission you three gentlemen to draw, in my name, and devote to the same purpose, for many a poor miner has been robbed by those cruel renegades of the mountains."

"Permit me, as a stranger to your town, but one who is interested in its mines, to donate a thousand dollars to the same fund," and Carl Kenyon placed that sum upon the bar, while a cheer from the crowd also greeted him as well as Dead Shot, for all were surprised by his great generosity.

But Judge Wolf noticed a strange look upon the face of the Sport, and Carl Kenyon also observed it, and bit his lip viciously, the latter act not escaping the keen-eyed judge.

"Hold on, pards!" and Tennessee Pete, Dick of Denver, and the Red Snake, whose absence Tarleton had already observed, as he glanced searchingly over the room, staggered into the door, bearing upon their shoulders heavy objects, which all knew at once to be dead bodies—and bodies, too, just exhumed from the grave, for they were coated with freshly dug earth.

Depositing their ghastly burdens beside the four dead "Angels," Tennessee Pete, shaking the mud and dirt from him, cried, excitedly:

"See heur, pards! we've bin on a perspectin'

tour, an' turned inter a committee o' three ter be body-snatchers, an' thar is ther result.

"Seein' as how we c'u'dn't find bullet marks on them four gerloots, nor knife-thrus' nuther, we just put this intelligent Injun on ther scent, an' thar is our diskivery. I tells yer, gents, that Injun are some—he are a whole team an' a hoss ter let, an' a whopper-jawed bull-dog under the waggin, you bet, fer he run them dead Angils ter ground in half a' hour, an' we dug 'em up for the edification o' these assembled gents. I tell yer, pilgrims, I hev kep' up a devil o' a th'inkin' iver sin' I see them roosters go under, an' then see 'em peradin' ther streets ther next day as big as life.

"Sez I ter myself, sez I, thar's some underhanded work heur, an' I went ter work ter see what I could diskiver.

"I don't say much, gents, but 'lets corn-ceilments, like er wurrum in ther bud, feed on my dam-aged cheek,'—an' I has considerable—an' thar's ther result—seven Angils all as like as two pods o' red pepper, 'specially in ther black hearts, kase them three has *ther red masks in ther pockits as well as the others*. Hurray, fer ther Gold Bullet Sport!"

The cheer was again and again repeated, and in the confusion Dead Shot, Major Melton and the judge slipped out, and returned to the hotel.

Carl Kenyon remained at the X. 10. U. 8. Saloon, and when last seen by Tarleton was in close conversation with Red Snake, the Cheyenne.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NEW ARRIVAL.

SEVERAL days passed away quietly at Central City, that is, quietly for that time of adventure, and Dead Shot, who appeared but little in public, had become the general theme of conversation at all the saloons and hotels, and his popularity increased with his notoriety.

For some reasons best known to himself, he had not taken forcible possession of the Deadman's Mine. Perhaps it was because the colonel had not yet returned, being detained in Denver on business—so he wrote to Judge Wolf; but each day the Sport paid a visit to the mine, and each night passed a short while in the X. 10. U. 8. Saloon, where he was always greeted with pleasure by its frequenters.

The Central City House, in the meantime, had lost two of its guests—Major Melton and his daughter, who had removed to their lately-purchased home; but it still retained Carl Kenyon, who seemed in no hurry to depart, though his business in town none, excepting the major, was acquainted with.

The fourth day after the killing of the Quartette, several important affairs agitated the little mining town. First, the Gold Bullet Sport had disappeared mysteriously the night before, and there were some who whispered their opinions that he had been foully dealt with, by some secret member of the Knights' band, while others thought he was off on some mission of which they would doubtless soon learn, and this idea gained ground, as it was observed that Dick of Denver and his pard, the Cheyenne chief, Slim Ike and Buckskin Ben could not be found.

A second piece of news was that Dan Smith's coach had been again attacked and robbed—this time on its way to Denver, and at the Devil's Gate; but the worst of it was that the express-agent, Mert Denison, had been on the stage, and was relieved of some fifty thousand in gold, and his life besides. Central City was therefore on the *qui vive* for the return of Dan Smith, to learn the exact truth of the unfortunate affair, and ther was talk of mustering the Vigilantes, to clear the roads of Captain Satan and his Knights.

The third event of importance was the return of Dan Smith, who drew rein before the Central City House, and saluted Judge Wolf, as though he had not passed through a desperate adventure on his outward bound trip.

"Is it true, Dan?" yelled a dozen voices.

"Is what true, gents? If it's whether I want yer ter treat me, I answer yes," was the provoking reply.

"About Mert Denison's having passed in his checks, an' ther gold besides," asked one of the crowd.

"Yer may gamble on it. Judge, thar is one pilgrim fer yer hash-factory—a youth o' tender years, as has not his nuss with him," and as Judge Wolf ushered the passenger into the hotel, Dan gave the horses in care of the attendants, and continued:

"Yas, Capt'in Satan an' his Knights chipped in at Devil's Gate, an' it was no use—Mert had ter let go his hold on life, an' then they got ther gold. He fou't well for it, tho', boys, an' died with his boots on, as game as a rooster with gaits."

"Waal, they throwed me in a leetle good advice, which I tuk with a thank ye, an' passed on; but ther best o' it all war ther ole gent as comed down with ther extra, ther day Dead Shot war with me, an' who sold his place to ther major."

"Oh Lord! but he were skeered out o' his senses, an' he swore he'd never leave Denver

ag'in. It war a lucky thing fer him he sent his dust on by letter, or they'd 'a' had it all, durn 'em."

"Did yer see 'em on ther back track?"

"Nary! We b'iled right through. Now, I is dry, fer I've had nothin' sin' leavin' Lem Flowers's at Golden City, kase ther young feller as comed over inside don't carry his p'izen, an' luks as tho' it hadn't been long sin' his mammy let up on ther bottle with him—he is so tenderlookin'."

The object of Dan Smith's last remarks had gone into the hotel, and been shown to his room, whither Sling Rum had carried a large trunk, seemingly well-filled.

He was apparently not more than eighteen, though he looked older on account of a slight mustache he wore.

His face was as handsome as a woman's, and though bronzed by the sun, bore a striking resemblance to Violet Markham—so much so, in fact, that Judge Wolf mentally swore that it was her brother, and a twin at that.

He was well-dressed, possessed of slender form, under the average height of men, and his hair curled in short ringlets over his head.

He was certainly a remarkably handsome youth; but, in spite of his womanly face, there were fearlessness and resolution in it beyond his years.

In a bold, round hand upon the hotel register he had signed his name as "V. La Coste, New York."

Having refreshed himself by a visit to his room, the youth descended to the office and called Judge Wolf aside.

"I have come to your town, sir, upon an important duty, and perhaps you can aid me," he said, in a pleasant way that at once won the judge in his favor.

"In any way I can serve you, my young friend, command me."

"I thank you, sir. I have been, for a year, in search of a person whom I have at last tracked to Central City; his name is Hugh Lambert."

Perhaps Judge Wolf started, for the youth quickly said:

"Do not tell me that harm has befallen him?"

"What is he to you, allow me to first ask—that is, is he a near relative?"

"He is as dear to me as a brother would be, I have sought him for so long, and much depends upon my finding him; but your manner leads me to dread evil," and the youth spoke earnestly, while his face was very pale.

"I will tell you all I know about him, and that is about as much as any one here knows. He came here about a year ago, from some other mining district, and he has been exceedingly unfortunate ever since his arrival, until the boys say he was nearly starving."

"Poor Hugh!" came from the lips of the youth.

"About a week ago he came into town and attended a concert, given by the boys, as a benefit to a young lady who had arrived here, and had been robbed on the way by the Knights of the Overland, and who, permit me to say, Mr. La Coste, was the very image of yourself."

"Of me!"

"Yes, were she your twin sister, the likeness could not be greater," and the judge looked searchingly at the youth.

"Strange, for I have neither sister or brother," said La Coste, sadly.

The judge looked disappointed, and the youth said:

"But you were speaking of Mr. Lambert."

"Yes; it seems he attended this concert, and when the basket was passed round for the dust for the young lady, he seemed strangely bewildered, and, having no money, threw in a gold miniature, studded with diamonds—a most costly affair, by the way, and it proved to be a perfect likeness of the lady to whom he gave it."

"What! a likeness of the one who was robbed and looks like me?" asked the youth, in great surprise.

"Yes, Mr. La Coste, and then he rushed from the theater, and since then he has not been seen."

"Great Heaven! I cannot understand all this that you tell me. Where is the lady now?"

"She went in search of Hugh Lambert the following morning and was captured by Captain Satan. Since then she has not been heard from, and she is believed to be at the retreat of the Knights in Guy's Mountain, and held for ransom. Our citizens have been waiting to receive word from her—as the Knights allow that—before taking steps for her rescue."

"All this is most marvelous, sir; but what was her name?"

"Markham—Miss Violet Markham, and she registered from New York."

"Strange, very strange; and Mr. Lambert has not been seen since?"

"No, not since he went away that night."

"What motive had she, this woman, in following him; do you know?"

"To discover, I believe, how he came in possession of her miniature."

"And no one knows whither Lambert has gone?"

"It is feared, sir—nay, I am almost certain of it—that he has perished."

"God in heaven! do not say that, sir—perished! How could he perish?" and the youth was as white as a corpse.

"It was the night of the fearful snow-storm, and upon leaving the theater he started at once for his cabin, miles away, by the road, in the mountains."

"No, no, no, he must yet live—he cannot have died," and an expression of intense suffering passed over the youth's face.

The chances are terribly against him, I am sorry to say, Mr. La Coste; it was a fearful storm; he was not too thickly clad. His cabin was found empty by the guide who conducted Miss Markham to the spot, and—"

"Go on, sir."

"I terribly fear that he is dead."

The youth was silent a moment; then he asked, quickly:

"Where is that guide, sir?"

"He left town last night; I do not know how long he will be away."

"Well, I must find some one who knows the cabin—in fact, I must find Hugh Lambert. If dead, these warm days are melting the snows and his body will be discovered; if not dead, why, I shall find him, for I will give five thousand dollars to the one who brings me information of him, dead or alive."

Judge Wolf looked with surprise at the youth before him. What urgent motive could he have in finding the lost young miner?

"Did you hear my offer, sir?"

"Yes, and it is most generous; I will to-night visit the different saloons and let the boys know, and one way or another, that is, good or bad, you will soon get news of your friend."

"In the meantime can you tell me of a reliable guide with whom to make the search myself?"

"I will look up some one for you by night, sir. Three men, any one of whom would be a host in himself, left last night for a trip of a few days, and one of them, by the way, is the guide who led Miss Markham to the cabin of Lambert. Ah! there goes a person who knew Lambert, and who can give you as much information as any one whom to get for a guide. In spite of the strange costume, it is a woman, Mr. La Coste; her name is Calamity Kate; shall I send after her?"

"No; I will myself follow and overtake her," and the youth left the hotel in pursuit of Calamity Kate, who, with a bundle of groceries in her arms, was walking briskly along in the direction of her isolated cabin.

That night the new arrival at the Central City House, his generous offer, and the object of his coming to town, were the topic of conversation in all the saloons, and many a miner determined to drop his pick upon the following day, and endeavor to earn the five thousand by finding Hugh Lambert, dead or alive.

CHAPTER XIX.

CARL KENYON OFFERS A COMPROMISE.

FLORENCE MELTON sat in the pleasant little sitting-room of her new home, which had already assumed an air of comfort, for it was the finest house in town, and the former owner had made some pretensions to "style," in the buildings and in beautifying the two acres of grounds that comprised the place.

A fine view of the town and valley, with the mountains in the distance, was visible from the piazza, and Florence with her riding-horse, guitar, household duties, paintings and embroidery, not to talk of a good library, felt that she could make herself comfortable and contented, for the time her father expected to be a resident of Central City.

Suddenly a step was heard on the piazza, and the maiden glanced up quickly from her book, while a look of disappointment crept over her face as she beheld one whom she did not really like, in the place of one whom she had hoped it was.

It was Carl Kenyon who had come that pleasant spring morning to the cottage, and her father being absent in the town, Florence was forced to receive the visitor.

She greeted him quietly, asked him into the sitting-room, and for the hour that passed, ere the entrance of the major, entertained him as best she could, at his request singing for him, and she possessed an exquisite voice, showing him her paintings and sketches, and she was no mean artist by any means, while the conversation drifted from general topics, upon music, art, travels and other themes that go to make up society talk, until the maiden was surprised at the knowledge shown by her visitor, and found him a most agreeable companion, indeed; still there was a lack of sincerity about him, she thought.

As for Carl Kenyon he was perfectly charmed with the beautiful girl, and made up his mind that he would win for her a wife.

When Major Melton returned and gave his items of news, gleaned at the hotel—that Dead Shot was still absent, Dan Smith had carried over another box of gold, which it was feared would fall into the hands of the Knights of the Overland, and that the youth, La Coste, had not been seen since the day before, when he left for

the cabin of Calamity Kate, who was also missing—Florence arose and left the room, and the major and his visitor were alone.

"Well, major, I have thoroughly looked over the mine, and its possibilities are far beyond what I believed. It is easily worth twenty thousand a year for a number of years; do you not think so?"

"I do, Mr. Kenyon. I looked thoroughly into the matter, and it is a valuable property at far more than the sum I paid for it. Your friend Keene certainly defrauded me out of a very handsome fortune. Why, in five years, I could become a millionaire with the Grizzly Mine," declared the major, sadly.

"True, sir, and no one more than myself can regret the most unlucky termination to yourself. I have not spoken of the matter, and hope you have not," said Carl Kenyon, kindly.

"No, sir, I have not—not even to my daughter, poor child."

"Major Melton, to run that mine properly it should have a manager of ability, and such I believe you to be; the position is open to you, sir."

"I am more than thankful, sir, and stern necessity compels me to accept your generous offer—can I ask what would be the salary?"

"Twelve hundred a year and five per cent. of the profits, to you, sir."

"This is generous, indeed, Mr. Kenyon, and I know not how to thank you."

"Major Melton," and Carl Kenyon seemed embarrassed: "Major Melton, it is a matter upon which I should perhaps not speak, knowing you as I have so short a while; but as it deeply affects my happiness I must do so."

"How you are pledged, as regards your daughter's hand, or whether her affections are otherwise engaged, I cannot of course know, nor do I wish to appear to offer to purchase either her favor or yours; but, from my first meeting with her, I have been deeply interested in her, until now I feel that she is dearer to me than all else in the world."

"I am a stranger to you, sir, but I am well-born, have received a college education, and the Grizzly Mine is not one tenth of my possessions; but, sir, if I may be so bold as to offer myself as your daughter's suitor, we can easily compromise this matter. I will turn the deeds over to you, and you shall be in full control, the owner of the mine. Have I offended you, Major Melton?"

Major Melton was completely taken aback, and, it may be said, pleasantly so, for from the very depths of despair he was raised to the seventh heaven of delight.

He had liked Carl Kenyon from the first; that he had been reared a gentleman was evident, and that he was very rich he had also reason to believe.

He was handsome, elegant, wealthy, played a surpassingly good game of cards, and would linger over his wine at table as long as any good company remained—all good traits in the military eyes of the major.

Yes, he would give up his idea of marrying Florence to a prince, duke or count, as the case might be, and let this fine fellow with the pleasant-sounding name have her, and together the three would make the tour of old England and Europe.

Florence was not engaged, and what could there be pleasanter than this arrangement, thought the major.

"Mr. Kenyon," the major began, slowly, "how can a father be offended when an honorable man asks for his daughter's hand?"

"It is sudden, sir, and takes me by surprise, as it doubtless will Florence; but I will consider your request in a favorable light myself, and so place the matter before my daughter that I think will gain her consent; for the rest it depends upon you. Dine with us at three and you shall have your answer."

The eyes of Carl Kenyon gleamed strangely, and he arose to go, saying:

"I thank you, major, and I will be on hand at three sharp. Remember, if Miss Melton accepts my offer, I settle upon you the Grizzly Mine, and ten thousand in cash upon your daughter."

"You are most generous, sir, for, excepting this house and a few hundred dollars in bank, I am no. penniless—no, I have a claim south of here, but it is absolutely worthless, I may say, as it pays me a mere pittance."

"Yes, many claims are worthless, where we expect fortunes from them. Is any one working your claim?"

"Yes, an old man, formerly a sergeant under me—a reliable old fellow, who barely gets his bread out the claim."

Carl Kenyon said no more, and took his departure, while Florence entered the room as he passed out the gate.

"Father, this little cottage is none of the largest, and, the doors being open, I have heard all—Mr. Kenyon does me the honor to request me to become his wife."

The maiden was very pale, and there was a tremor in her voice that partially hid an accent of scorn.

"Yes, he is a fine fellow, rich, handsome, elegant in manners, and—"

"Oh, yes, papa, he is all that; but what do you know of him?"

"Well, as to that, but little, Florence; yet here, you know, every man's face is his recommendation, and—"

"And you wish me to accept him, papa?"

"Well, yes, Florence, I really do. You are not engaged?"

"No."

"Not in love?"

"Who should I love, papa?" and the eyes drooped and face flushed; but the major set that down to maidenly modesty in being questioned upon love matters.

"True, who should you? Then you will marry Kenyon?"

"There is a reason why I should, papa, and I insist upon knowing it. I heard some talk about your getting twelve hundred a year and five per cent. of profits, as manager, when I believed you the owner of the mine, and then of your becoming proprietor *in toto* of the Grizzly Mine, if Carl Kenyon could become master of my heart and hand; what does it all mean, papa dear?"

"In plain words, Florence, I have been defrauded—tricked by the man to whom I paid my money for the Grizzly. He was the discharged manager—a Carleton Keene, who played Carl Kenyon, and he had not a dollar in the mine."

"Too bad, papa, for you are forty years of age now."

"Thirty-nine and seven months, Florence; I married your mother before I was twenty-one, you know," corrected the major, who really did not look his age, and was handsome enough to be taken for the husband, or brother, of Florence rather than her father.

"Well, sir, you are old enough to live on what you have made, and not to have to work for others at your time of life."

"Gospel truth, Florry, and if you marry Kenyon all will go well; he has been most generous, offered me the management at a fair salary, and—"

"But could you not catch the man who defrauded you?"

"Yes, dig up his body. He lost all his money at the gaming-table and then killed himself."

"A just, yet terrible retribution; and if I marry Carl Kenyon, you get the Grizzly Mine?"

"Yes, as sole proprietor, and you get ten thousand dollars cash in pin-money; then, as soon as we get matters to panning out well in the mines, we will all go to Europe. Who knows but that I may catch a princess, or a countess there?" and this idea flashed through the major's mind like an inspiration.

"Father," and Florence spoke in earnest tones, while her voice trembled, and eyes filled with tears, "Father, to save you, to add to your happiness—for of late I have seen that some terrible trouble has weighed you down—I offer myself for the sacrifice; I will marry Carl Kenyon, any time he may desire after one month from to-day."

"God bless you, Florence! If you loved another I would not ask it, or if Carl Kenyon was other than he is; but I believe he will make you a loving and devoted husband. My little Florry, you have taken the iron out of my soul."

Three hours after Carl Kenyon learned that Fate had so decreed that Florence Melton was to become his wife: but—

"There's many a slip
Twixt the cup and the lip."

CHAPTER XX.

STRIKING IT RICH.

READER, have you forgotten unfortunate Hugh Lambert?

I hope not, for it is of that young miner that I would speak in this chapter.

Upon that night of storm, when he had fled, half-starved, from Central City, and half-crazed at the memories of the past, brought up by the sight of Violet Markham, he had wandered out of his path homeward, and it was well for him that he had done so for at his cabin was no food, and only dreary desolation awaited him.

Reckless of life, he had met the huge grizzly bear in the mountains, and with a desperation born of the recklessness of despair had fought a brave fight, until wounded, bleeding, and as he had believed, dying, the two fell together into a deep pit.

It was a sink-hole, almost a natural well in the rocks, and across its mouth had grown light vines, now filled in with drifted snow until it looked like a firm foundation, in the blinding storm.

The bear went first, and Hugh Lambert, clinging to his hairy hide, was dragged with him adown the forty feet which they fell.

What life the bear had in him was knocked out by the shock as he struck the rocks, and his huge body well broke the fall of the miner, yet he was unconscious when he struck the bottom.

How long he lay there Hugh Lambert never knew; but at last he returned to consciousness, and the pendulum of life came swinging slowly back again.

At first his mind was bewildered; but after awhile his thoughts returned clearly; he was in

total darkness; above him howled the storm and moaned the pines; around him were rocky walls, and beneath him the body of the bear stone dead and now cold.

He was also frozen, and attempted to draw the blanket, that still hung to his shoulder, closer about him; but it was frozen stiff.

"Great God, where am I? Have I found a tomb in which to die?" he murmured, and for a time gave himself up to despair.

But then, the desire of life came strongly back to him; he felt that he was not dangerous, wounded, and that no bones were broken.

The cold had stopped the bleeding, made by the claws of the bear, in arms, breast and head, and he hoped came to him.

Then he remembered that he had some matches in a tin box in his pocket, and these were at once brought into requisition.

They ignited, and dry leaves, twigs, nay, some good-sized branches of trees were in the well-lit pit in which he found himself.

Quickly he had a cheerful fire burning, and crouched close to it to get warm, while his clothes and blanket rapidly dried, and a steam arose from the hairy monster near him.

He saw that he was in a sink-hole, some ten feet square, and with smooth walls of rock running up as far as he could see; how deep it was he could not conjecture; but, just above his head was a cavern-like opening some three feet in diameter. Where it led to he had no means of knowing.

With returning bodily comfort, he became hungry once more, and in the twinkling of an eye set to work to get food.

Skillfully, with his keen knife, he began to skin the bear, and in an hour's time had the splendid hairy robe hanging before the fire, while he toasted huge slices of the juicy meat upon a sharpened stick.

Observing that he had not a very large quantity of wood, and not knowing how long he would have to remain imprisoned, he cooked a large quantity of food, and then, throwing himself upon the bear-skin, and folding his blanket around him, he sunk to sleep.

When he awoke a dim light came down from above into his prison, for such it was, and he was stiff and sore, and weak from loss of blood, for the heat had caused his wounds to reopen.

Quickly he dressed them as best he could, at some snow, drifted down in one corner, to quench thirst, and then took what food he craved, after which he set to work to see if it was possible for him to extricate himself from his perilous position.

Rekindling the fire, he dragged himself up, by standing upon his main support, old grizzly, to the cavern-like entrance, and observed a glimmer of light within.

Entering, he crept upon hands and knees for some thirty feet, and came out into a canyon, a gorge; but there he was compelled to stop, for the precipitous sides were beyond his reach, and the rocks were smooth and slippery.

A waterfall rushed through the gorge, falling from the rocks above, and here and there was heaped up a quantity of brush that would serve as fuel. Truly he would not freeze or starve so long as his wood and bear-meat lasted.

But was he to remain there to die? Could he not plan some means of escape? If not, he surely must die.

Suddenly he started, gazed an instant, and then falling upon his knees, grabbed up a double handful of earth from the stream.

One glance at it, and a shriek so long, so loud, broke from his lips, that one hearing would have believed it the cry of a wild beast in agony.

"Gold! gold! precious, shining gold! beautiful gold!"

"Oh, how I love gold! See, I have handfuls of it! No, I have handfuls of it! See, I fill my hat, and here lie thousands and thousands of dollars more."

Eagerly he grabbed up the frozen dirt, tearing his finger-nails to the quick, and staining the precious yellow metal with his blood.

But little he cared, for he had the "gold fever"—the "yellow fever," and had any one come there then and found him, he would have sprung like a tiger upon him to rend out his life, for when just seized with the gold fever, having found a rich claim, a man goes mad—as surely mad as was ever a crazed being in a mad-house.

For a long time did Hugh Lambert struggle and tear up the earth, heavy with gold, and then, wholly exhausted, and his wounds reopened with his wild exertions, he fell over in swoon.

When he again became conscious it was night, and he was weak, suffering and ill; but, with great difficulty he managed to ignite some of the dryest brush, and soon had a good fire, in the light of which the gold reflected mellow rays.

But his yellow fever had subsided, and he was now calm, and able to think of his good fortune, and also to remember his bad, for he was imprisoned in the midst of wealth; perhaps he might die there, in that golden retreat, and the stony walls would only hurl back in his teeth his cries for help, and forever surround his bones as a rocky tomb.

"I have but one course to pursue, and that is to gain strength here, and then make a desperate effort to escape; moreover, I must do the amount of work required to make this claim my own, in case I should get out of this dungeon of despair," he said to himself, and he bathed and redressed his wounds, collected enough brush to keep up a constant fire, and crawling back to the pit into which he had fallen, he cut off a sufficient quantity of juicy meat to last him for several days; then he again sought sleep, and awoke refreshed, after a long and unbroken slumber.

As strength returned to him, he went to work with his knife, and dug deep into the earth, turning up the rich gold with every stroke of the blade, and occasionally finding a "pocket," in each one of which was a small fortune.

Having done the "reasonable amount of work" on his claim, he set about plotting some means of escape.

A thorough investigation proved to him that he could neither scale the walls of the pit or the canyon—the former was over forty feet deep, and the sides as smooth as glass, and the latter was a mere gorge between high walls, over seventy feet in height, and impossible to scale; while the little brook tumbled into the upper end of the gulch over a shelf far above human reach, and found exit by another fall, which he dare not approach near enough to look over; but the roar of the water proved that it was a long way to where the rushing stream struck the rocks below.

Upon one side of the gorge, nearly fifty feet from where he stood, was a clump of small, stunted pines, one of them leaning a yard and a half over the chasm.

"There is my only chance. If I can gain that clump of timber, I can easily reach the top," he muttered, and at once set to work with energy to make the means with which to reach the stunted pines.

Cutting his blanket into strings, he tied the ends together, and then fastened to it a stone which he felt he could throw over the leaning pine.

Effort after effort he made without success, and at last sat down exhausted, as night-shadows threw his retreat in gloom.

But with the morning he was again at work, to in the end meet with success; the stone went over the pine, and its weight drew the line after it until he held both ends in his hands.

Then he again set to work and cut the bear-skin into long strips, which he braided securely together, until he had a rope that would hold up thrice its weight. But the night came on again, and he awaited for daylight to come, and fastening his bear-skin rope to his blanket string he dragged it over the pine.

Now he was all excitement, for would the pine hold him up, or would it yield under his weight and come tumbling down upon his head.

By degrees he tested it, and a shout of joy broke from his lips as he swung from the ground and began to climb hand-over-hand up the rope.

For ten feet he went on rapidly, and then his strength gave out; he was weaker than he had thought, and he could not place one hand above another.

A moment he clung with the energy of despair, and then the hands could clasp no longer, and with a frenzied shriek at his accursed luck he fell back upon the gold-dotted earth.

How long he lay there he knew not; but when at last his eyes painfully opened, he started with a cry of joy. A form was swinging between earth and sky, and, hand-under-hand, descending the rope.

With eager eyes he watched the descent, and then half arose as the form touched the ground, while from his lips broke the fervent cry:

"God bless you, Calumity Kate!"

CHAPTER XXI.

AN AWFUL DOOM.

It was after sunset ere Carl Kenyon took his departure from the home of Major Melton, and then he walked rapidly back to the hotel and ordered a horse saddled, as he wished to ride out to the Grizzly Mine to see the miner in charge, who it was said was quite ill.

At a rapid gallop he passed out of town, and in half an hour drew rein in the wild-looking canyon in which the mine was situated.

A few rude huts were visible upon the slopes of the hill and near the entrance to the mine, and at one of them Carl Kenyon halted and called out in a loud tone:

"Ho! within there!"

"Give us yer handle, pard, fer these are ticklish times," said a voice within.

"It is I, Frisco Frank."

"Ay, capt'in; glad 'tis yerself," and the door opened and a man appeared, whom the moonlight showed to be in miner's dress, and a person of decidedly unprepossessing appearance.

"Frisco Frank, I wish you to go with me to the Secret Cave, and I may wish to command your services in a way that will pay you well," said Carl Kenyon, quietly, and he dismounted and hitched his horse to the corner of the cabin.

"All serene, cap'n; I'm yer honey. Shell we light out now?" answered the man.

"Yes."

The miner turned and locked his door, and the two set off together up the canyon, disappearing in the shadows of the overhanging rocks and pines.

A walk of ten minutes brought them to a narrow and wild gorge, and clambering up the rugged side of the rock they came to where there was a small fissure, into which Frisco Frank thrust his hand and drew out two long poles, nailed a foot apart with small pieces of board; in fact it was nothing more than a footbridge, for it was placed across the gulch, from the spot where they stood to a shelf beyond.

Over this frail support the two men passed, and entering a split in the rock came upon the entrance to a small cave.

"Go in and bring him out, Frank; I hate to enter the loathsome place," said Carl Kenyon, and, as his companion entered the cavern, he stood gazing around him upon the hill-tops, still covered with snow, the dark valleys, and the wild scene nearer by, all lighted up by a moon almost at its full.

Presently the clinking of chains was heard, and out from the darkness into the light came Frisco Frank, followed slowly and painfully by a man heavily ironed upon hands and feet.

The moon shone brightly into the face of the prisoner, for such he evidently was, displaying a look of intense suffering resting there; he was well dressed, a man of thirty-five perhaps, with brown hair, dark complexion, and a beard of some days' growth covering cheeks, chin and upper lip.

"You can await me yonder, Frank," said Carl Kenyon, and the miner walked away, while the prisoner sunk down upon the rocks, as though too weak to stand, or because weighed down by the irons upon him.

"Well sir, I have come to offer you terms. If you accept them, well and good; if not, why your life will be of precious little value to you."

The voice and manner of Carl Kenyon were stern and cold as he spoke; his tones had lost the softness that seemed habitual to him.

"You have no right, sir, to dictate terms to me. Our compact of crime was long since at an end, and he whom we both sinned against is in his grave; what have you against me now?"

"I will tell you; you, excepting yielding to my bribe to injure another—"

"Stern want made me do that, as you know, and in sackcloth and ashes I have repented it."

"Silence! I say that after I threatened you with exposure, and forced you to fly West, you came here and managed to live an honest life, while I have gone from bad to worse, until I am now—never mind, I am all that is bad, and I hate you for it."

"You came here and dug a fair sum out of yonder mine down the valley, and then sold it for as much more cash, with which sum you intended to return to your old home and enjoy your wealth; but Carleton Keene—"

"I have dropped that name; call me by my right one. You know I only assumed a fictitious name to keep you from finding me when I came West; but alas! evil spirit that you are, you found me after all my precaution, and when I believed myself free of your hated presence, I find myself in your power."

"True, and are likely to remain there, unless you accede to my terms."

"No, I shall call you by your alias, for your own name I bear at present," sneered the man known to the reader as Carl Kenyon.

"In Heaven's name what do you mean?" gasped the prisoner.

"I will tell you, Carleton Keene; when you sold the Grizzly Mine to Major Melton, you should have at once gone East; but no, you needs must run down somewhere to look up another claim, and what you there discovered caused you to again fall into my power."

"What mean you?"

"Simply that I had a spy upon your movements, and he tracked you to your old claim, and saw you when you went from there, finding it worthless, to the claim of Major Melton."

"Great God!"

"You may well be surprised, for I know all—know that you found old Sergeant Caleb dying with fever; that he told you he had lately struck it rich—had found a new lead in the major's mine that promised to pan out a million or more—in fact, there was no end to the yellow metal to be found there, and he made you swear, to a dying man, to make all this known to Major Melton; had my spy had the grit, he would have let the sergeant die, killed you, and bounced the mine himself; but he didn't have the 'sand,' I am glad to say, but came and told me, and thus it was that you found yourself captured on the way to see the major, and make known to him the joyous news."

"Then a glorious idea struck me. I knew you were known in your own mine here, as only its manager, pretending to have purchased it for another party, but that you sold it to Major Melton in your own name, as of course you had a right to do, but as the supposed proprietor had never been seen in Central City, it entered my brain to personate him—"

"Oh, you incarnate devil!"

"Thank you; yes, I came into Central City and registered as Carl Kenyon, as soon as I had you in my power, and I visited Major Melton told him that my manager, Carleton Keene, was dishonest, and that I had discharged him, but, knowing all about the Grizzly Mine, having the papers in his possession, with maps and drawings, he had personated me, Carl Kenyon, and sold the valuable property, thus defrauding him, the major, out of his fifty thousand dollars."

The prisoner was dumb with astonishment, merely raising his manacled hands and shaking them at the man before him.

"Well, this green-horn of an ex-major bit at my bait, nay swallowed it whole, and the result is I have possession of the Grizzly Mine now, and the major was to have been my manager, had we not come to a compromise, which was to give him the mine for his beautiful daughter, another stroke of policy on my part, as she will, of course, inherit the very rich claim which Sergeant Caleb was working for her father; now have I not played my cards well, and held a full hand every time?"

"You are Satan himself, in the disguise of man."

"Again, thank you; now, listen, for I wish to have you know how I trumped your ace; as Carl Kenyon I sent to Denver, by the Express Agent, and drew out of the bank the one hundred thousand you had deposited there, of course sending all necessary vouchers and etcetera—was not that splendid?"

"And I am a beggar," groaned the unhappy man.

"You are indeed; your whole trip West, in the mines, thrown away. A great pity; but yet have a chance to get all that money back, and more too, besides saving your life, if you have the wisdom to take my advice."

"Tell me what you wish."

"Simply to give me all the papers given you by the dying sergeant, with the descriptions as to where to dig for the gold, and all particulars told you by Caleb."

"If I refuse?"

"I will have Frisco Frank starve you to death. You know him, and that while working for you he was my spy; he will do as I say."

"If I accept your terms?"

"Then you shall have back your one hundred thousand, and a fifth as much more, and go free at once."

"I will not trust you."

"You will have to, if you wish to save your life."

"And you swear to let me go free, and give the papers to Major Melton?"

"Yes, when his daughter is my wife."

"What a terrible fate for her, poor girl!"

"It will be a worse one for you if you do not do as I wish," threatened the man known as Carl Kenyon.

"When shall I have my money, and go free?"

"This night. I have gold checks already made out for the amount for you on New York; but you must swear to at once leave the mine, and never, by word, act, or writing to betray me."

"I will swear; I left the papers with Lem Flowers, at Golden City station. I feared to bring them with me, as attack was dreaded by Captain Satan."

"Give me an order for them."

"He will give them to you upon the presentation of this card, and your telling him what you wish," and the prisoner handed the Ace of Diamonds, adding: "Lem Flowers has the Ace of Hearts of the same pack, so as to compare cards."

"Is this true, Carleton Keene?"

"Yes, upon my honor."

"Very well, I will give the major the card and go after the papers, telling him that a minor, whom I took care of when dying, told me that Sergeant Caleb had given him the particulars, etc., and asked him to seek Major Melton and make known the good news; but I will first make the fair Florence my wife."

"Now, Carl Kenyon," and the man spoke with the utmost vindictiveness in his tone, "you are a fool, for I never would allow you to go free and betray me."

"You know too much of my past, should I wish to go East to spend my riches. No, you are doomed to die; you have taken your last meal, and had your last sight of mankind on earth. Frisco Frank!"

"Ay, ay, boss!" and the burly miner replied.

"Take this man back into the cave and iron him, there to die. Do not bring him any more food, and never come here to the cave until I tell you."

"All right, cap'n."

"Do you mean this great crime?" asked the unhappy man.

"I do, as you shall know."

"Then may God's everlasting curse be upon you wherever you are—by day, by night—at all times, and in your very grave."

The words were hurled from the lips of the doomed man; and the one upon whom his curse fell seemed to shrink away with a shudder; but

the next moment, with a mocking laugh, he turned away, as Fr'isco Frank bore the prisoner back into the cavern, too heavily ironed, and too weak from confinement in that loathsome hole, to offer any resistance.

Ten minutes after, Carl Kenyon, as he is to be still known to the reader, mounted his horse and galloped back to Central City, leaving Fr'isco Frank in his cabin, counting over his gold—the blood-money just earned.

CHAPTER XXII.

A WOMAN'S HATE.

WHEN Violet Markham found herself in the power of Captain Satan and his Knights of the Overland, she felt fully the unfortunate situation in which she was placed.

Bodily harm she did not so much dread, though from what was said of Captain Satan, she feared him, and she knew that it would take a large sum in gold to ransom her, and though she had considerable in the hands of Judge Wolf, she yet had other uses for that; still, her freedom and safety were worth far more than her money, and she determined to make a liberal offer for her liberty as soon as her captors came to a halt.

After a rapid ride of several miles, Captain Satan gave an order to his men, and they dropped off, one by one, in directions oblique to that which he still pursued, and in a short while Violet Markham was alone with her captor; but though she several times essayed conversation, he remained silent, and she was forced to cease her efforts to discover his motives in capturing her.

After a ride of several hours, in which the horses had been urged on as fast as the snow would admit, Captain Satan led the way into a deep ravine that ran back into the rugged slopes of Guy's Mountain.

Up this canyon, which gradually narrowed to a mere passageway between lofty walls of rocks, and was a constant ascent as they progressed, they continued for a couple of miles, when, through a split in the rock, the chief of the Road Knights turned off abruptly to the left, and the tired steeds were then forced to clamber up the steep and rough side of the mountain, until they came to a scene of the wildest grandeur. Huge boulders of rocks were thrown together as though by the throes of a volcano, and were piled one on the other to immense heights, until they formed a natural castle of rocks, with hundreds of cavern-chambers, passages, doorways and windows.

From this natural castle, rugged yet wonderful, a grand view could be obtained of the hills and valleys for miles around, and of the snow-covered mountains, from whose foot-hills curled up columns of blue smoke, marking the humble cabins of the miners.

Into an arch in the rocks, Captain Satan led the way, and though it darkened as he went on, he rode without hesitation, still leading Violet's horse by the bridle-rein, as he had ever since he separated from his men.

A few minutes' ride in the darkness, and light appeared again, and Violet found herself in a large and vaulted chamber, used as a stable by the Knights, for fully two score of fine steeds were there, and one man, evidently acting as guard.

"Look after these horses, Miguel, and saddle my sorrel for me," said Captain Satan, shortly, to the dark-faced Spanish Californian who acted as guard.

He then lifted Violet from her saddle, and led her from the large rocky chamber, into a passageway, and up rude steps, to a plateau above, upon which opened several caverns.

Here they were met by a young girl—at a glance recognizable as an Indian, and yet with the features of a pale-face, and a complexion not as dark as a red-skin's.

She was dressed in a costume which many a wealthy city belle would have gone wild over, to have been able to wear it to a masquerade ball—a skirt of red cloth, worked in colored silk, and falling to her knees—leggings of the finest buckskin, and kid boots, instead of moccasins, covering feet that were very small and shapely.

An embroidered buckskin jacket fitted her form closely, and around her waist was a leather belt, containing a pistol and small dirk-knife, while necklaces of silver and gold beads, of pure metal and large as a pea, encircled her neck, and bands of gold her bare arms, above and below the elbows.

Her hair hung in two braids down to her knees, and a jaunty hat of gayly-dyed feathers surmounted her head.

Her face was beautiful and intelligent, and her form faultless. Altogether she was a remarkable-looking creature to be found there in that wild retreat.

As she came forward toward Captain Satan and his captive, her eyes fell upon the latter, and there came into them an angry light; but, unnoticed this, the chief said:

"Lalulah, go and order two guards stationed at the entrances to this place, where I am to leave this lady a prisoner, and in your charge, for business calls me at once away, to be absent several days, perhaps longer."

"Say to them that their lives shall be the forfeit if she escapes."

"And what will my punishment be?"

The girl spoke in perfect English, and with a sweet smile, while her voice was rich and soft.

"The same fate. Now see to it," was the almost savage retort.

The Indian maiden turned quickly away, but Violet Markham saw that her bronze face flushed a deep red, and then turned of a grayish hue; but without another word she walked off to obey the commands of the chief.

"Here is your home, until you and I come to a fair understanding. It rests with you to say whether you will remain here until your death," and Captain Satan turned to Violet and spoke in a constrained voice.

"You have but to name the price of my ransom, and if within my power it shall be paid."

"Ransom? Woman, no gold on earth could get you from my power; no, my revenge I love too well; but I wish you to sign certain documents that I will have drawn up, and which will clear me in the eyes of the world, when I return to my old home in the East."

"You are mistaken, sir, if you deem me able to serve you."

"No, I know you. One with a face as beautiful as yours is only met once in a lifetime. Once I loved you madly, and I would have married you; but you gave up my love to become the wife of a felon, and now I hate you."

"That he is dead I know—and I believed you in your grave, until I saw you last night at Langrish's Theater."

"You are certainly mad. Upon my honor as a woman, I never saw you before."

"Ha! ha! ha! Oh, I forget that I am disguised—now look at me and tremble."

The man removed his disguise of false hair and beard, and along with it the red mask, and Violet Markham gazed straight into the face thus exposed; but she was certainly a superb actress, if she ever saw the man before, for neither by look nor act did she display the slightest recognition of her captor.

"You are now, as before, only Captain Satan, the robber chief, to me."

"Woman, you lie in your false throat."

"Coward!" and the voice rung as Violet Markham pronounced the word.

"Hold! Now I shall know, for here comes the girl. Lalulah!"

"Chief."

"Lead this woman yonder to the cavern, and see if there is upon her bosom, above the heart, a wound, as though made with a knife."

"Yes, chief," and the Indian girl led Violet Markham into a cave near by and opening upon the rocky shelf or plateau.

"There is no wound of any kind, chief," she said, quietly, as the two returned together.

"Can I be mistaken? No, it were impossible; there is some trick in this which I shall yet fathom."

"Lalulah, if that woman escapes from here remember that I shall cut your heart out, girl, and throw it to the wolves!" and Captain Satan resumed his disguise and mask and left the plateau.

A moment after his departure Lalulah—the Maybird—turned to Violet and asked:

"Lady, who are you, and what are you to him?"

"My name is Violet Markham; I am an actress, and came to Central City to look up one who fled West to escape punishment for a crime he committed, and whom I desire to find, to learn from him of my parentage, for he alone can tell me."

"I was robbed yesterday by the Knights of the Overland, and the kind-hearted miners gave me a benefit—one of them giving a diamond-studded picture of myself, and in searching for him to-day at his cabin, Captain Satan made me prisoner and brought me here. Now you know all that I can tell you, and in your kindness of heart I know you will aid me to escape—no, no, I would not have you do that, for I heard his threats against you."

"But he said you had met before—for God's sake tell me if he spoke the truth?"

"No, I never saw him before, and his strange words are a mystery to me; from what he said, to be the one he supposed me to be, there should be a scar upon my bosom; you saw that there was none."

"True; he must be mistaken. I believe you, lady, and—I hate him now."

"What can he be to you?"

Violet Markham regretted the question as soon as she asked it; but Lalulah answered quickly, and with deep feeling.

"He was everything to me. He came among my people and won my love, and though he was of the pale-face race I left them to go with him, for I liked not the red braves of our tribe."

"My mother was an Indian, the daughter of the great Cheyenne chief Red Snake; but my father was a white man, a hunter, and he was married to my mother by the rites of our people and lived with our tribe until his death, a few years ago, and it was through his teachings that I became superior to the daughters of the braves around me; it was through my love of my father that I learned to love the pale-faces more

than my mother's people, and left them for that man."

"Poor child, and he is unworthy of you," said Violet, with sympathy.

"He has deceived me; he has never loved me; I was but his toy; and, oh! he is so evil, for he wars against his own race. He is a renegade; but his wicked life I could forgive, for I loved him, had he not told me of late that he hated me. So be it, for I hate him now, and he shall know Lalulah can hate. He shall not find his fair prisoner here when he returns; and worse, I will lead the soldiers of his race upon his retreat, for my grandfather, the Red Snake, has only spared him for my sake."

"In a day or two, lady, we will leave this place, and seek a secure hiding-place I know of in the mountains, until we can reach the miners' camps."

"God bless you, my sweet girl! Aid me to fly from here, and ever after you shall be as my sister."

"I am glad, for I have no one in the world to love me, except the Red Snake, and I do not wish to go back to my people. I am not a red-skin at heart. Now come into the cave, warm yourself by the fire and get some rest, for we will have hard work before us to arrange our plans," and Lalulah led the way into one of the caverns, which Violet was surprised to find a most comfortable retreat for a robber stronghold.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CATCHING A TARTAR.

It seemed a strange circumstance to many of the citizens of Central City, that, after the very recent bold robberies by Captain Satan and his men, Dan Smith should let it be known that he was again to carry over to Denver a large quantity of gold expressed to that town.

And as the stage and its six fine horses disappeared from the town, with only two inside passengers, both miners, many conjectured that Dan would be ordered to "throw up his hands" before he got through Devil's Gate.

But that "prince of the reins" cracked his keen whip over his leaders, and rattled along at a merry pace, a strange twinkle in his bright eyes.

Prognostications do not always turn out as prognosticators desire; but in this case the growlers of Central City were correct, for at the foot of Guy's Hill, as the stage rolled slowly along, there suddenly came the stern and startling order:

"Throw up your hands!"

Dan Smith quickly brought his horses to a halt, and up went his hands, as they had on a number of occasions before, while he cried out, impatiently:

"Durn yer all, Knights, this are gittin' mer-notenous."

Out from the woodside, where they were hidden in the underbrush, came five men—all wearing red masks, and they were dismounted, though Dan well knew that their horses were not far distant.

Two of the five went to the heads of the horses, and the other three approached the stage, one, who appeared to be the leader, going upon the right, the other two upon the left.

"Who have you got as passengers, and what booty?" asked the leader, in a stern tone.

"Ef yer is curious, jist look an' see, durn yer; yer isn't any Sunday schule teacher ter ax me categchiz," said Dan, gruffly.

"Look here, Dan Smith, you are getting too free-spoken of late; you'll get a bullet through your brain if you do not keep a more civil tongue in your mouth," angrily said the Knight.

Dan made no reply, and the robber opened the stage-door upon one side, as his companions did the other, and never did men meet with greater surprise.

Suddenly, and as if by magic, the stage seemed full of men, for out of each door sprung several forms, and in five seconds the robber leader was a prisoner and his four men were lying dead in the road, while Dan Smith yelled like an Indian in his delight.

A moment after up dashed the two miners who had left Central City as inside passengers to Denver, and they were leading several horses.

"Guesses as how yer've cotched a Tartar this clip, boss," and Dan shook his whip in the face of the leader of the Knights, and then he continued:

"Ah, Dead Shot, my festive friend, you is a screamer!" and he turned and wrung the hand of Tarleton, who, with his allies, had so suddenly turned the tables on the robbers.

"Now, men, drag those ladies into the bushes here, and we will see how much this gentleman values his life," and Dead Shot, with his hand upon the arm of his prisoner, led the way into the pine thicket that bordered the road.

"Good-by, pards; I'm dumb until I gets back. Luck to yer, all round. I'm blest ef I don't jine yer church, I are so happy. Git, horses!" and away rolled the coach, Dan Smith still laughing loudly at the way in which the Knights had "caught a Tartar."

Seeking a secure retreat Dead Shot turned to his prisoner, and quietly removed the mask from his face.

He was a man of slender form, though athletic, and about forty-five years of age, with iron-gray hair and mustache; his face was intelligent, stern, not ill-looking, and his eyes black and very piercing. That he was no ordinary man was evident and his dress was better than that of his dead companions, who had been thrown upon the ground before him.

"Well, Sir Knight of the Road, I have sworn to hunt down your band, and we have begun well," said Dead Shot, sternly.

"I am not he whom you call Captain Satan," said the Knight, quietly.

"I know that, very well. You are the lieutenant of Captain Satan. The men call you Iron Heart, but your real name is Carter Gray."

The man started, and his face became very pale; but he made no reply, and Dead Shot continued:

"Three years ago you killed a man in Richmond, Virginia, and you fled here to escape the gallows, for it was a cold-blooded murder. There is a large reward offered for your apprehension. Do you wish me to give you up, Carter Gray?"

"Am I a fool?"

"Oh, no, I cannot accuse you of being a fool, but I can of being a merciless wretch—one whose cruelties as a Knight of the Overland have gained for him the name of the Man with the Iron heart."

"How know you this, may I ask?"

"From what I personally found out. Do you remember a man of your band known as California Kit?"

"Yes; he was with us six months, and then mysteriously disappeared; we believed him killed, or captured," answered the Knight known as Iron Heart.

"California Kit and myself are one and the same."

"And in the name of the devil, who are you?"

"Upon the books of the Central City House I am registered as Mr. Tarleton, but I have been lately christened Dead Shot, the Gold Bullet Sport."

"Curses! You are that man, are you?"

"I am."

"You are certainly a devil with revolver and knife, from all I have heard. When with us you seemed a mere cipher in the band."

"I was playing a part then; I am in earnest now. Do you value life, Carter Gray?"

"Why ask me?"

"Well, do you value it enough to save it by betraying your comrades?"

"I love my life more than I do theirs; they are nothing to me except as a means of protection," said the road-agent.

"Well said. Now, how many men are at present in the band of Knights?"

"A week or so ago there were twenty-seven, all told, at the retreat, and six on special duty."

"Four of those on special duty were known as the Angel Quartette?"

"Yes, and all are now singing hymns with the Devil's choir," recklessly said Iron Heart.

"With three more from the band who joined them to fill up the vacancies made by death?" calmly suggested Dead Shot.

"You ought to know; you called for their checks."

"Making seven gone," continued Dead Shot, without noticing the remark of the Knight, while Buckskin Ben and the others, excepting Red Snake, seemed greatly surprised at all they were learning about the Gold Bullet Sport.

"These seven, with one killed at the miner's cabin in the mountains, six in the attack on Dan Smith's stage some days ago, and four to-day, reduce the band from thirty-three to fifteen; two of these fifteen are now on special duty; Captain Satan is absent somewhere on the road, and you are a prisoner in our hands; this reduces the number to eleven men now at the Castle of Rocks. Is my arithmetic correct, Iron Heart?"

"Perfectly; you are splendid at figures."

"Now, these eleven are at the Castle of Rocks, and I depend upon you to help us capture them," and Dead Shot looked the man straight in the face.

"How can I?"

"I will tell you: as an officer you will be obeyed. Go to the retreat and order eight of those men to come with you, upon some excuse or other, and lead them into ambush; if they surrender, well and good; they shall be taken to Central City for trial; and if they refuse, we will shoot them down without mercy."

"And I?"

"Will be spared—for you must then go on with us to the retreat, and let us surprise the three men that remain there."

"And my life will be spared?"

"Yes, after you have appeared against your confederates in crime."

"Then I will be set free and the citizens will string me up."

"No, I pledge you my word you shall be protected."

"If I refuse to betray the Knights?"

"Then I shall send a bullet through your head where you stand, or take you back to Virginia for trial—as you prefer."

"The Knights must go by the board. I am not anxious to be shot or hung," and Iron Heart laughed recklessly.

"Well, you know my terms. Lead on! but mind you, Carter Gray, if you attempt any trickery, I swear you shall be hunted down, and when taken, I will turn you over to this Cheyenne chief to torture you to death as best suits his pleasure."

The man shuddered. He knew well what cruelties Indian nature could devise, and he said:

"I shall not fail you; for some time I have thought the Knights had about gotten to the end of their rope, and was thinking of emigrating to new fields."

"Lead on; we await you," was Dead Shot's stern response, and mounting their horses the party set out, leaving the dead Knights concealed in the bushes.

At length Dead Shot halted; they were within half a mile of the Castle of Rocks, and in a gorge, than which a better place for an ambush could not be found.

"I have warned you, Carter Gray; now go!"

The lieutenant of the Knights at once set off on his mission to betray his confederates, and Dead Shot placed his seven men—for the two miners from Central City, and whom Dick of Denver had selected as good men and true, were with them.

A half-hour they waited, and then down the hillside was seen a file of horsemen approaching, Iron Heart, with a view to self-protection, riding considerably in advance.

Slowly they came on, nine in number, the narrow pathway causing them to ride in single file.

Presently they entered the gulch, where the man-hunters lay in ambush, and loud, clear and stern rung the cry:

"Throw up your hands all of you!"

The Knights drew rein, some seized their revolvers, and others turned, as if about to fly, while Iron Heart and several more obeyed the stern command:

"Hold! or you are dead men!"

The three horsemen in the rear of the line heeded not the threatening order, and the next instant they fell dead from their saddles, just as they attempted to dash away.

This deadly assault taught the others a lesson, and up went their hands, and five minutes after Dead Shot had his prisoners securely bound.

"Now, Iron Heart, you have another duty to perform; lead on to the retreat."

The road-agent lieutenant immediately obeyed, and arriving at the Castle of Rocks, and anxious to gain favor with his stern captor, he walked up to the robber guard and deliberately shot him down, for from his officer he expected no danger.

The next instant Dead Shot and his comrades dashed into the rocky stronghold, and the secret retreat of the Knights of the Overland was in the hands of the Gold Bullet Sport, who at once made his way to the cavern plateau, as the shelf of rock was called, upon which fronted the caves where Captain Satan had his quarters and kept his booty, and where the beautiful Lalulah dwelt.

The booty, in vast quantity, and of great value was there, but no person guarded it!

"Where is the Indian girl, Lalulah, and where the lady captive of your chief?" asked Dead Shot of Iron Heart, whom he had kept with him.

"The Indian aided the captive to escape; for they left two nights ago—how, no one knows, for they did not pass the guard," indifferently responded Iron Heart.

Turning to the Red Snake, Dead Shot said a few words in the Cheyenne tongue, and the Indian gave a grunt of assent.

"Now, boys, we will spend the night here and you can divide your booty, and to-morrow we will return to Central City," said Dead Shot.

"An' ther party leddy?" asked Slim Ike.

"Is safe, for the Indian girl, whom Captain Satan had here with him, and who is the granddaughter of the Red Snake, aided her to escape. Boys, you will find plunder enough here to repay you, and, as far as we are concerned, it has been a bloodless victory."

"Mr. Gray, you must submit to being bound, but I promise you my protection," and the Gold Bullet Sport turned to Iron Heart, who yielded with a bad grace.

Telling Buckskin Ben to look after the prisoners, and Dick of Denver to drag the booty from the caves, Dead Shot called to the Red Snake and the two walked away together—they would have been better pleased to have found Lalulah and Violet Markham in the Castle of Rocks.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CALAMITY KATE ON THE TRAIL.

FEARING to make himself conspicuous by addressing Calamity Kate in the public thoroughfare, the youth, La Coste, followed slowly on after her, until she reached her own isolated cabin near the forks of the road.

Kate entered her humble abode and the moment after heard a knock, and behold the youth as she opened the door.

"My good woman, I have come to ask you to

serve me, and you may be assured that I will pay you liberally," said La Coste, in his soft, winning voice.

"Come in, sir. The air is still chilly as it comes from the mountains. Now, sir, there is precious little service I can render any one, but what I can do I will do willingly."

"Thank you," and as Kate's eyes were bent searchingly upon him, and there was an expression in her face which he could not understand, the youth went on to say:

"I came to your town to find a miner whose name is Hugh Lambert; and Judge Wolf, at the hotel, tells me ill-tidings of him—that is, that he started for his mountain cabin in the storm, some nights ago, and has not since been seen; but I was directed to you as one who could perhaps give me information regarding him, and I have offered five thousand dollars to find his whereabouts."

Calamity Kate started; then her eyes again wandered searchingly over every feature of the youth's face.

"Young man," she said, slowly, dropping unconsciously into the dialect of the mines, "it are a large sum ter put up fer a man, an' when ther stakes run high as that, a feller is ter b'lieve that Hugh Lambert is wanted somehow fer reasons that will git his neck inter a sling. Now, ther young miner war a good friend ter me when I war sick arter ther death o' my—my—hus—arter ther death o' my man, an' yer is a-barkin' up ther wrong tree ef yer think I is ther gal as will sell 'im out, ef it's fer twice ther dust yer name."

"You mistake me, my good woman; I mean Hugh Lambert no harm, but on the contrary desire to serve him. I am the best friend he has in the world, and for one year I have sought him, until I tracked him here, to find that he is believed to be dead. Tell me that you can find him!" and La Coste spoke beseechingly.

"I'll tell yer what I'll do."

"Well?"

"We will start at once on his trail; he may be dead and he may not; if dead, we will find his body, for the snow is melting fast," and Calamity Kate left off the dialect she at times affected, and always when talking to the miners.

"Are you strong enough to stand a rough tramp?" she continued.

"Yes, I can stand anything to learn his fate."

"Then we'll go at once. It is some hours before dark. Must you return to the hotel?"

"No; they expect me back, but, never mind."

Kate made no reply, but at once set to work preparing for the expedition.

She quickly put into a stout bag what provisions they would need, and two flasks of liquor, after which she rolled up four blankets in an india-rubber cloth, and secured matches and ammunition about her person.

Then she looked to her revolvers and handed one to La Coste, at the same time saying:

"You had better draw on these rough clothes over yours, for you will need them."

The youth silently obeyed, and then Kate took from over the chimney-board a repeating-rifle and a hatchet and expressed her readiness to depart.

Dividing the traps between them, they took up their loads and left the cabin.

"Now here," and Kate halted at a spot where the roads again divided, about a mile from her cabin; "here you see is where Hugh Lambert lost himself. I was out just after the storm, the morning following, and I saw tracks in the snow, but they were half-filled up. And this is the road, branching off here, that leads to Hugh's cabin, but this drift you see across it fooled the poor fellow, in the blinding storm, and he went right by and in this path, for the snow was unbroken when I came here, as I told you."

"He took this road then, as you say; it certainly seems reasonable," La Coste assented.

"It could be no other way, for snow always deceives one as to locality, and, from all accounts, he was in no mood to closely watch his path. Now let us strike round into the mountains by this path."

Slowly the two continued their way. Calamity Kate, with great skill, watching every object that would be likely to turn the wanderer in the storm from his path.

The snow had settled a great deal, was melting fast, and there had been persons along since the storm; but Kate took in the situation as it was on that terrible night.

Presently she again halted and looked closely about her.

"See here, sir; this spot does not look unlike the road back yonder, where he was to turn off for the mountains, and here is where he struck up the slope. Yes, here are old tracks, made before the snow ceased falling, and nearly obliterated."

"You are right; they lead straight up the mountain."

"Yes, just as the road back yonder runs. He mechanically turned off here, and by force of habit kept up-hill, as he would do if in the right path."

"Then you think he has perished?"

The question was almost in a whisper.

"The chances are a hundred to one that he has."

"But he may have reached some cabin?" and the youth's face was very pale.

"No; I will not deceive you; there is no cabin within two miles of this spot, and the further he went up the mountain the more he left hope behind. He was the only one living on this slope of the mountain above the valley. I say, sir, poor Hugh Lambert!" and Calamity Kate spoke with considerable feeling.

The youth made no reply, but set his lips firmly, and then, after a few moments' silence, asked:

"And from here?"

"We will follow this faint track in the snow, and it will tell us the story."

"Whether dead or alive?"

"Whether dead or alive?"

"I am ready."

Again the two went on, this time toiling hard up the steep hill, and through the heavy, drifts. At length darkness came on, and they were forced to halt for the night; but they found a comparatively comfortable spot under the shelter of a boulder, and a fire was soon sending its ruddy glare out into the darkness, while the two trailers sat before it in silence.

Soon Calamity Kate rolled herself in her blankets and went to sleep, or pretended to do so, for from the shadow she gazed long and earnestly into the face of the youth, who said it was useless for him to seek rest, and kept his seat before the fire.

But at last tired nature exerted its right, and the youth's head bent over on the arm that rested upon the rock, and he slept soundly.

Cautiously Calamity Kate arose and wrapped his blankets, which she had furnished him with, around his form, and threw more wood upon the fire; then she again crept back to the warmth of her humble bed, and slumber also came to her.

The sun was gilding the tree-tops when they awoke, and the fire had burned out, except a few coals; but more wood was thrown on, and the two ate their breakfast of bacon, crackers and coffee, in silence.

"I dropped off to sleep last night, I was so tired; it was so kind of you to cover me up," said the youth.

"I feared you would take cold. Now let us move on."

Again they followed the trace in the snow, and after a while Calamity Kate halted suddenly.

"There has been a desperate struggle here—see, the ground is stained with blood, but whose?"

A moment she watched the traces on the ground, where the snow was trampled down, and had then been partially covered over, yet not sufficient to hide the stains when the surface was brushed off.

"Whose?" Calamity Kate again repeated, and she sprung forward to the track that met the one they were trailing, and a cry broke from her lips.

"What is it?" gasped the youth.

"It was a grizzly bear, and a large one, too, from his tracks—ha! here is a sink-hole, and together they fell into it."

Both now stood looking down into the pit, the mouth of which was some five feet in diameter, and widened as it went down; but all was dark below a few feet from the top.

"I will cut up my blanket, make a rope, and go down, for it is there."

"What?"

"The body of Hugh Lambert."

The youth turned his face quickly away, and then a cry broke from his lips:

"See, there is a smoke!"

Both ran toward the spot, some sixty feet away, and came to the brink of a deep chasm in the rocks, through which they could see that a mountain-stream poured its flood; but that some one was down there they knew by the tell-tale smoke.

"Hold this end of my blanket, and I will creep down to yonder clump of pines and look over," said Calamity Kate, for the shelving walls of the chasm prevented their seeing down into the bottom of the canyon.

Seizing the blanket by one end, while the youth let it lengthen gradually, the fearless woman crept down to the pines, which she reached just as a wild shriek came up from the bottom of the canyon.

"He is below, and safe."

The words were almost shrieked from the lips of Calamity Kate, and she felt the blanket loosen, and saw the youth fall backward. She did not hesitate now, but seizing the bear-skin rope, swung herself over the brink of the precipice, and descended, hand under hand, to the bed of the canyon.

A little water in the face, a brisk rubbing of the head and hands, and the eyes of Hugh Lambert opened to behold Calamity Kate bending over him.

CHAPTER XXV.

A STORY OF THE PAST.

"God bless you, Calamity Kate," had been the first words of Hugh Lambert when he told who was his preserver.

"Let up on blessin' me, pard, for I hain't ther-

boss o' this b'ilin'; I is only second fiddler in ther dance."

"You are the first one to reach me, Kate, and I believe I would have died here, for I had not strength to climb out."

"It mout be, but yer has held on ter life like a cat, fer yer has hed a severe rastle with a grizzly, an' yer hevn't hed a palice ter live in," and Calamity Kate glanced around her.

"It is better than the tomb, Kate, and it was a lucky tumble here for me, and shall be a lucky find for you. Kate, look yonder at the gold."

"Great God! you have struck it rich, Hugh Lambert; but stay here, for I have a friend to bring to see you," and in her earnestness she dropped her slang way of speaking.

"No, Kate; I will share with you, but with none other. This is our secret."

"Very well, and I thank you; but I'll soon come down again," and Kate went up the rope with astonishing dexterity.

As she had feared, she found that the youth had fainted; but he quickly revived when she forced some liquor into his mouth.

"He is saved, you say?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes, and almost as good as before. Can you climb down a rope?"

"Yes."

"Then come; let us first lower the traps, for we will have to stay several days in the canyon, until Lambert is strong enough to get out with our assistance, for he is weak."

"I will run back to town, and—"

"No you won't! He don't want a gang after him, for he has found a gold-mine."

"A gold-mine?"

"Yes, rich and rare. Down goes our luggage!" and Kate lowered the traps and rifle.

"All right, Kate! Now come down yourself," cried the rich voice of Hugh Lambert from below, and the youth's face paled and flushed by turns, while he trembled violently.

"I fear you cannot go down," said Kate, kindly.

"Yes, I can! It is only a momentary weakness. I expected to find him dead, you know," and La Coste gained control over his weakness and swung over on the rope, for Kate told him to go first.

She watched him as he went down; saw him turn and face the miner, and then heard the cry:

"Thank God, Hugh, I have found you!"

She saw the miner start back, stagger, and then came in thrilling tones:

"Virian! Virian! my wife! you here!"

Then Calamity Kate turned away from the chasm, and for an hour she paced to and fro in the timber; but at length she approached the canyon again, cautiously slid down to the growth of pines, and went down the bear-skin rope.

As her feet touched the ground Hugh Lambert sprang toward her:

"Kate, you have brought me my wife—my life!"

"I knew from the first she was a woman. That little false mustache and the man's attire did not deceive me. I am glad, madam, that you have found your husband."

There was a calm dignity about the woman, in spite of her wild looks and half-masculine costume, that impressed the miner and his new-found wife strangely, and he said calmly:

"Kate, to you, I again say, I owe my life and my restoration to my wife, and it is but due that I make known the painful circumstances that drove me a fugitive to this far land."

"Mr. Lambert, I do not seek your confidence. I have but done my duty, and I thank God I was able to be of service to you."

"Still, Kate, I would rather make known to you something of my past, for Vivian and myself have talked it over, and she agrees with me, that to you I can make a clean breast of it."

"I came here to the mines, as I thought, a murderer, for I raised my hand against the life of one whom I believed had won from me my wife's love."

"It was all a deep plot against me, I am now told—a woman's plot for revenge, because I refused to make her my wife, as all her friends and mine wished; but I did not love her, and followed where my heart led—married Vivian here, and Isabel Vascar plotted revenge."

"It is all clear now, for Vivian has told me how she cast suspicion upon my wife in many ways, and made me the instrument of her revenge, and also avenged herself upon me at the same time."

"She had a lovely cousin visiting her, and in size, color of hair, and form, she was not unlike my wife, and being engaged to a young man who had slighted Isabel Vascar for Vivian, that arch-fiend plotted to make me do a deadly deed."

"Her cousin was poor, and Isabel had her a costume made to wear to a ball, the very counterpart of one which my wife was to wear, and she got the lovers into an arbor in the grounds, sought me, and led me to witness a scene that froze my very blood. It was, as I believed, my wife, receiving the caresses of a man who had once been her lover, and whom both she and myself greatly admired; in fact he was my dearest friend."

"I was blind with jealous passion; I saw but the form, hair and dress, and that Lawton

Herndon bent over her in a tender manner, his arm around her waist.

"I dragged from my pocket a Derringer pistol, and fired quickly at him. Both fell, and Isabel Vascar hurried me away, and I fled for my life."

"Two days after I saw a paper with a most garbled account of the affair, and the names so mixed as to be almost unrecognizable; but it told me that Lawton Herndon was dead; that the bullet had, after mortally wounding him, entered my wife's neck and made a hideous wound, though not a dangerous one."

"From that day to this I have never read a paper, and believed myself the murderer of Lawton Herndon; but, retribution came upon Isabel Vascar. She was thrown from her carriage, and, when dying, sent for my wife and confessed her crime, and then this brave little woman set out in search of me, and after a long year of tracking has found me—found me to tell me that it was Vivian Lammond that was with Lawton Herndon, the similarity of the two names causing the mistake in the paper, and, joy unutterable, that my bullet did not kill Lawton Herndon; it wounded him severely, and 'twas feared he would die, but he recovered, and is now the husband of Vivian Lammond, who was also wounded, yet slightly, by the bullet burying itself in her neck; but they lay the crime at the door of Isabel Vascar, and not upon me."

"And Kate, our good friend, my sweet wife tells me that in my absence my business was wrecked, that my fortune was swept away; but, what care I now? I have princely wealth to offer her, and you are half-owner in this claim, for if I found the mine, you found me. Now, Kate, you know all that I can tell you."

Calamity Kate had listened most attentively to the strange story of Hugh Lambert, and then said, in her quiet way:

"I offer you both my warmest congratulations, and hope for your perfect happiness in the future. As for this gold, I will take just as much of it as will buy me a certain joy I have longed for these many years. Then it was not your wife to whom you gave the miniature the other night?"

"No, and there comes in the mystery. She was the perfect image of Vivian—her form, face, voice and all, and sung as does my wife; but I have a confession to make. I visited the rooms of that woman in the hotel, and she fainted at sight of me, and I brought away the miniature which I had, under a sudden impulse, thrown into the basket. Nay, more; I was dazed upon not beholding upon her neck the seal that I believed my bullet had left upon my wife. Who that woman, or girl, can be, I cannot imagine, and Vivian says she came in search of me to my cabin, and was captured by Captain Satan."

"Yes; but she will be rescued, for there is one upon her trail who seems invincible, and will bring her back, if man can do it. Your wife's name is Vivian, I believe, and the one who so resembles her bears the name of Violet Markham?"

"Yes."

"Who was your wife before you married her?"

"Vivian La Coste."

"Strange—very strange," and Calamity Kate sat silently nursing for a while, but presently roused herself and said:

"You must gain strength now, rapidly, ere I will go to your cabin after pick and shovel, and we will work this rich strike, until you are able to get out of here; then we will return to Central City and make known your good fortune. I have seen strange things happen in these gold-mines," and Calamity Kate again became lost in deepest reverie, while Hugh Lambert and his wife sat together in happy conversation, and at their feet were piles of precious yellow gold—a small fortune in a single heap.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CENTRAL CITY IS AMAZED.

It was hard work for Dan Smith to "hold in"—not his horses, but himself—and not tell how the Knights of the Overland, in a little plot arranged by Dead Shot, had "caught a Tartar"; but he kept his promise, and though he had thrown out sundry hints, had not in so many words told of what had happened.

Of course he made known that he had brought over a large quantity of "dust," and that he had not lost it, though the Knights had ordered him to "stand and deliver"; but the secret of his escape, he said, was not then to be made known.

In Denver, through the medium of Dan Smith, the Gold Bullet Sport had become as well known by name as he was in person in Central City—in fact, his fame had spread down to Pike's Peak and up to Cheyenne, and gaining addition with distance, it was reported afar from Central City that Dead Shot had, single-handed, defeated Captain Satan and his entire band of Knights; but there were many who had met the Knights of the Overland, and been robbed by them, who took this story with a considerable grain of allowance.

As Dan dashed along, on his return to Central City, with several "pilgrims" inside, as he

Gold Bullet Sport.

called them, his eyes brightened as he came to the scene of the trouble the day before.

Suddenly he drew rein, as if by instinct, expecting the old cry of "Throw up your hands!"

But the forms whom he had, at first glance, taken for Knights, were seen at a second look to wear petticoats.

"Moses in the bulrushes! I'm teetotally durned glad ter see yer—I is, by Jingo!" and Dan threw himself from his box and grabbed the hand of Violet Markham!

"And I to see you, Mr. Smith, for we have been dodging in the mountains for several days. I escaped from the Knights of the Overland by the aid of this Indian girl, and we wish a ride to Central City, when I will pay you."

"Pay? Git in, you an' yer pard, who are as putty fer a red as you is fer a pale-face. Git in, an' ef I don't astonish the jedge then call me a liar. Oh, Lordy! but it does my liver good ter see yer! But, whar is the Sport?"

"I do not understand," said Violet.

"Why, the Gold Bullet Sport an' his pards went arter yer yesterday, an' jist at this heur spot ther was— But I fergits that I darsn't tell. Git in, white leddy, an' red, an' I'll roll yer inter Central in no time. Pilgrims, jist squar' yerse's inside tha few, fer these ledies are friends o' mine. This are my sister an' shet are my coz, so jist make yerse's small an' givin' room," and the "pilgrims" in the coach having made room, Violet and Lalulah were handed in. Dan sprung again to his box, cracked his whip, and away rolled the coach.

At a speed which the citizens of Central City had never seen equaled, the Denver coach dashed up to the hotel, and with a whoop, that caused all to believe him drunk, Dan Smith drew rein before the door.

"Jedge Wolf, hop lively fer Queen Victorer ar' a inside pilgrim. Hop up, jump up, tumbleup, an' scramble up to h'ist her enter the groun'!"

"I has other pilgrims fer yer hash-factory, but ther queen are ther trump-keerd, so hustle her out fast!"

With surprise, and wondering what great female dignitary had honored the town and gotten Dan drunk on the way, Judge Wolf, hat in hand, swung open the stage-door.

"Miss Markham!"

"Yes, my dear judge, and most delighted to get back to your kind protection; and I have brought a friend with me—one to whom I owe my escape from the Knights of the Overland."

With a glad smile, and words of welcome, Judge Wolf aided Violet and Lalulah to alight, and Dan Smith ushered them into the hotel, while the judge looked after his other guests.

Five minutes afterward a crowd had assembled in front of the hotel, for the news of Violet's return had spread like wildfire, and the miners were anxious to welcome her back.

As they stood there a cavalcade was suddenly described coming into town, a crowd at its heels, and shout after shout was heard as the horseman in advance was recognized.

It was the Gold Bullet Sport—calm to indifference, and riding with the ease of a superb horseman.

Behind him came Buckskin Ben, and riding by his side was Carter Gray, or Iron Heart, and then followed the other prisoners, seven in number, and horses laden with the dead bodies of the remainder of the band.

Behind these were a number of steeds, heavily freighted with the plunder found in the Castle of Rocks, and Slim Ike and Red Snake brought up the rear, for the remainder of Dead Shot's allies were guarding the captive King of the Overland.

"Great God! they have captured the whole band of Captain Satan!"

It was Carl Kenyon, or the one bearing his name, who spoke.

"Yes, and by the Lord Harry the Gold Bullet Sport has done it," cried Judge Wolf, and he rushed out to meet Dead Shot, who at that moment glanced up at the window of the hotel and turned deadly pale; but he called back to Red Snake in the Cheyenne tongue, and the Indian also looked up at the windows, but made no sign of having seen anything surprising.

"Tarleton, by Jove! I am glad to welcome you back! And you were successful?"

"Yes, judge, took the whole stronghold in; but Captain Satan is yet at large, but I will soon have him, too. I see that—that—Miss Markham is back?"

"Yes, arrived half an hour ago—Dan picked them up upon his return trip, for she brings a pretty Indian girl with her, who aided her to escape from the Knights. I see you have not lost a man?"

"Not one; a perfect victory. Now I will take the prisoners on to the jail and then return. To-morrow we will try them."

"And hang them; but, come back soon, for I wish to drink a hallelujah over you."

As the cavalcade moved on, it became evident that there was trouble brewing, for a number of idle men, and dangerous spirits, had gathered around and meant no good to the prisoners, for loud threats were heard from every side.

"Back, men! I have charge of these prisoners and I will see that they are protected and get a fair trial," said Dead Shot, firmly.

"Fair devils! They is Knights o' the Overland, an' was tuk as sick. Let's hang them up, boys."

"You did not take them," was the quick retort of Tarleton.

"Say, my honey, ef yer has too much lip we'll string yer up with the Knights," yelled a loud voice on the outskirts of the crowd, and as Dead Shot made no reply, another called out:

"Git ready, pard; we'll string up the Knights an' derwide the plunder."

"Close in around these men. Ike, yo' and the Cheyenne move on to the jail with the plunder."

The order was calmly given, and quietly obeyed, Dead Shot and five of his followers quickly ranging themselves around the prisoners, while Slim Ike and Red Snake moved on.

"Pards, they is goin' ter perteck 'em, or I is a liar. Let's snatch 'em," cried a voice, and he laid his hand on the bridle rein of the steed ridden by Dick of Denver.

"Do not fire any of you, unless compelled to. Move on!" and Dead Shot urged his horse forward, and the others followed his example; but the hanging fit was now at fever heat with the crowd, and some one—who none knew—fired a shot, and a Knight of the Overland was hard hit; it was the Iron Heart, Carter Gray.

But he kept his seat, and Dead Shot thrust into his hand a revolver.

"Defend yourselves as best you can—fire!"

The order of the Gold bullet Sport was not a moment too soon, for a surging crowd was around them, a score of hands upon their bridle-reins, and one of his own men, one of the two miners who had joined him, had fallen dead from his horse.

For half a minute there was a rattling of revolvers, shouts, shrieks of agony, snorting and tramping of horses, and then Dead Shot and his little party dashed through the crowd and rode rapidly to the jail; but Tennessee Pete lay dead behind, along with one of the Knights, and the other miner who had joined them fell from his horse as they rode along, while nearly all the rest of the party had received slight wounds.

At the jail they were met by the sheriff and his posse, coming to their aid, and behind them the law-abiding citizens had turned out *en masse* to punish those who had wantonly attacked them. In fact, Central City was in earnest, and the rioters were forced to levant as quickly as they could.

"I am mortally wounded, sir; but you did all in your power to protect me; do not let me die in jail."

It was Carter Gray that spoke, and Dead Shot saw that he was indeed dangerously wounded.

"You shall be taken to the hotel and have every care. Here, boys, get a litter, and bring this man with me," and Tarleton turned to his little band, who were now at leisure, having given over to the jailer their prisoners, and stored their plunder in safety.

The litter was soon brought and the wounded man borne to the Central City House.

At that moment Violet Markham passed, and a voice called her name:

"Violet! Violet!"

The maiden paused, turned quickly, and with a bound was by the side of the dying man.

"Carter Gray! Thank God, I have found you."

She bent over the wounded Knight just as Judge Wolf came forward to order him taken to his room.

"Oh, Judge Wolf, he is the man whom I sought—and he is wounded," she cried, with commingled joy and regret.

"Yes, he was in the trouble outside a few moments ago. Come to his room if you would see him, Miss Markham."

Violet stepped back, her eyes still upon the wounded man, as the bearers raised and bore him away, and at that moment Dead Shot came upon her, face to face.

He was deadly pale, but she showed no sign of recognition, and followed the wounded man.

"I am mistaken, as I believed. How could it be she—she who has been years in her grave? But what a startling resemblance! Who and what can she be? Ha!"

Dead Shot started back suddenly, for before him glided the very counterpart of Violet Markham.

"Great God! and who are you?"

Tarleton turned almost fiercely upon her, while the woman shrunk from him, and a deep voice said:

"That lady is my wife, sir; I am Hugh Lambert, at your service."

Dead Shot glanced from the woman to the man, and then said, absently:

"Pardon me, sir; she came upon me as a specter from the grave. I have just seen one her very image; I am bewildered."

With a bow, and another strange glance at Vivian Lambert, Dead Shot passed on, just as Judge Wolf came forward, and with almost equal surprise started back.

"Sainted Methusalah! am I awake?"

"I hope so, Judge Wolf, for I would like a room for myself and wife."

"Hugh Lambert, by the Holies!"

"Yes, judge, and not dead, as was believed, thanks to my wife here and Calamity Kate."

My wife, Judge Wolf, whom you knew as Mr. La Coste."

"I'm blessed if I'm drunk, and—but things are slightly mixed. Mr. Lambert, I am glad to see you alive, sir, and also to meet your wife; but if her twin sister is not in this house under the name of Violet Markham, you can kick me and I won't resent it."

"I never had a sister, judge; I am an only child; but the likeness between Miss Markham and myself must be strange indeed," said Vivian.

"It is miraculous; but, Lambert, you shall have a pleasant room at once, and if I seem bewildered you must excuse me, for things are mixed in this town just now. For instance, my young guest, La Coste, left the hotel several days ago, and comes back Mrs. Lambert, along with yourself, who certainly if not dead, deserve to be for going out in that storm to your cabin, when you knew my house was always open to you. Then Dead Shot captured the Knights of the Overland and their stronghold, and a party of idle devils attempt to hang his prisoners and raise a row in the street, in which, thank Heaven, they were sadly worsted; then up drives Dan Smith with Violet Markham and an Indian girl, just escaped from Captain Satan's band! I tell you, Lambert, things are top-heavy in Central City, and I'd like to know what will pan out next."

"I have struck luck at last, judge—got a claim worth a million, and Calamity Kate is my pard. By the way, she came to your hotel to-day, and got some things out of the trunk of your guest, La Coste, for my wife did not wish to be known longer as a young gentleman."

"I wondered where she got her feminine togs from, and I'm blest, madam, if I know whether you are more beautiful as a woman than handsome as a man; but, Hugh, you look seedy, and I will get you a room once."

"I am a little shaky on my pins yet, judge; but I'll soon come round all right," replied Hugh Lambert, pleasantly.

In half an hour more the news of Hugh Lambert's safe return was known, and that his wife was with him, and, added to the other surprises that had just occurred, Central City was certainly amazed beyond precedent.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CARTER GRAY'S CONFESSION.

THAT Iron Heart, the lieutenant of the Knights of the Overland, was certainly dying there could be no doubt, for there was a bullet in his side, and internal hemorrhage was slowly taking the life of the strong man.

He had been taken to a large and pleasant room in the hotel, and thither Violet Markham had followed him, and the physician, called in by Dead Shot, had told him there was no hope whatever, and then had gone off to attend to some other unfortunate who needed his services, for the Gold Bullet Sport and his allies had left a red record behind them, in their passage through the mob that had attempted to check their progress.

In the room with the dying man were Violet Markham and Tarleton—the latter having been sent for by Carter Gray.

He had bowed to Violet upon entering, and yet there seemed a pained look upon his handsome face whenever he gazed at her. There were also two others in the room—Lalulah and the Red Snake—the latter seeming quite contented at having at last gotten his grand-daughter away from Captain Satan.

"Mr. Tarleton, I have a confession to make to this young girl, and I would be glad if you would bear what I have to say," and Carter Gray spoke with the utmost calmness. He knew that he was to die, and was no man to cry out against his fate.

"If you desire it, sir, and this lady has no objection, I certainly am willing to oblige you," responded Dead Shot, and he glanced toward Violet, who bowed her consent, and Iron Heart went on:

"For your benefit I will say, Mr. Tarleton, that I am an actor. I come of a good family in Virginia, but ran off and went on the stage, becoming infatuated with an actress, whom I afterward married."

"We had no children, and ten years ago adopted a little girl that was playing childish parts with her supposed mother, who was taken ill and died in New Orleans, when our company was performing in that city."

"My wife nursed Maud Markham—such was the woman's name—and before her death she told us that the little girl, Violet, was not her daughter, but the child of a rich banker in Boston—that the mother of the child had deserted her husband, running off with another man whom she loved, for she had married the banker for his money."

"Shortly after her flight from her home she had given birth to triplets—three little girls; but the man for whom she had forsaken her husband swore she should get rid of the children, and she had hired a nurse to carry them to their father, in Boston."

"But the nurse cared not to be bothered with so many children, and gave one to Maud Markham to adopt, and another one she carried to a

lady who advertised for a baby girl, to take the place of one she had just lost.

"Maud Markham died, and we took the little child, Violet there, and raised her as our own, until my wife took ill, and was shortly after laid in the grave. That was three years ago, when Violet was nearly eighteen.

"All that was bad in my nature at once broke out, when my wife was no longer with me, to hold me in check, and I became dissipated, gambled, and one night, as you know, shot a man over a game of cards, in Richmond, Virginia.

"It was deliberate murder—the man won the game fairly, and I killed him, and fled for my life. You know the result. I am now dying an outcast, a fugitive from justice, and an officer of the Knights of the Overland.

"At the time of my flight, my daughter, as I called Violet, was giving concerts, and I was acting as manager; but I left her in the lurch, and carried with me her hard earnings. I saw by the papers that she continued her concerts, and boldly stated in a public card that I was not her father.

"I also saw that she went upon the stage and became an actress of considerable celebrity. Now I find her here in Colorado, and her admissions to the proprietor of this hotel told me that she was in search of me."

"I came here to find you, Carter Gray. You know that, though I loved your wife, I never cared for you, and often wished to leave you; but I was a mere girl, and could not, for I knew not how.

"Why I sought you here I will tell you; the papers often speak of me as Violet Markham, daughter of Carter Gray, who, it will be remembered, committed a most diabolical murder in Richmond, Virginia, some years since.

"This species of advertising I am tired of, and knowing that you knew who my parents were, I sought you out to get from you the truth. Alas! I find the first truth a great grief; my poor mother was untrue to my father—a false wife! But go on; tell me all I would know," and the maiden spoke with great bitterness.

"There is little more to tell, Violet, except the name of your father; it was Walter Woodbridge."

"Walter Woodbridge! My God! can this be?"

The eyes of Carter Gray and Violet at once turned with surprise on the speaker—the Gold Bullet Sport.

"Yes, such was his name—Walter Woodbridge, a banker of Boston."

Dead Shot essayed to speak, but no word came from his lips, and he turned his face to the window, his whole form trembling with some deep emotion.

"Do you know my father, sir?" and Violet laid her hand softly upon the arm of Tarleton.

"I did."

"Did! He is not living then?"

"No, he died four years ago," and an expression of intense pain passed over the face of Dead Shot.

"Was my sister with him? Mr. Gray says the nurse sent one of my sisters to my father."

"Yes, she was with him when he died."

"You know her then?" and a glad light came into Violet's eyes.

"She was my wife!"

Even the dying man started, the act wringing from him a groan of agony, as Dead Shot made known what the sister had been to him.

"Was?" and Violet's voice trembled, her lip quivered, and her eyes were full of tears.

"Yes, she is, alas, dead! Now you know why I was so affected at seeing you in the theater the other night. You are the very image of my lost wife. At first I hoped, and almost believed that she had, in some miraculous way, risen from her grave, for I knew not that she had a sister; she never knew it herself, nor did Walter Woodbridge know that he had but the one child."

Violet drooped her head in her hands and her form shook with emotion, and Dead Shot stood near, cold, white and stern, while upon his face rested a look of inexpressible anguish. At the window, silent as statues, stood the Red Snake and Lalulah, and Carter Gray lay with closed eyes, breathing heavily, yet uttering no groan of pain.

At length Violet raised her eyes, and asked in a broken voice:

"And my other sister, Mr. Gray?"

"Her name was Vivian. The lady who adopted her was wealthy, and her name was La Coste—Leroy La Coste was her husband, and they lived in New Orleans."

"Do you know whether she is living or not?"

"She was, six years ago. At the request of my wife, knowing the history of your sisters and yourself, I wrote to find out regarding them. Since then I know nothing about them."

"Do you know aught of my mother?" and the voice faltered.

"She is living—nay, strange as it may seem, the man for whom she deserted her husband came to this very town, some time ago. I knew who he was, and was in Boston at the time of your mother's flight, and remembered, when Maud Markham told me who was your father,

the excitement the elopement caused there, for the man was well known in the city as were your parents."

"His name?" almost fiercely asked Violet.

"Was Otis Egbert—a gambler of fine appearance, and remarkable luck; but ill fortune must have dogged his steps after his flight with your mother, for he was working a small claim here when I saw him, a year ago, and was killed in a fight at some saloon. Here he was known, on account of the strength he possessed in his hand, as Steel-Grip Otis."

"He was killed, you say?"

"Yes."

"Thank God for that! and my mother—my poor, poor mother?"

"Is somewhere about the mines now; she is known as Calamity Kate."

Again Dead Shot started, and Violet turned quickly toward him:

"You know her?"

"Yes, I have met her. If she has sinned I know that she has bitterly repented of her sin. She is not of the evil, and her heart is in the right place."

"God bless you for those words! You will take me to see her soon?"

"Yes."

Again a deep silence fell upon all, unbroken save by the heavy breathing of the dying man.

At last he tried to speak once more, turned his eyes imploringly upon Violet, gasped for breath—once, twice, and the wicked life of Carter Gray, he whose cruelties had won for him the name of the Iron Heart, was at an end.

"He is dead," said Violet, in a whisper, as though awed by the presence of death.

"Yes, he is dead; but you are not alone, for I am your brother now."

The maiden looked into the true, sad eyes of the man before her, and said, softly:

"Yes, you are my brother now."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VIGILANTE JUSTICE.

THERE were certainly a number of persons in Central City who felt quite sore over the death of Iron Heart by bullet; they thought that the pistol had "cheated the gallows" of one whose life had been such as to well deserve hanging.

But, there were the other Knights upon whom to wreak vengeance for the many murders and robberies committed upon the mountain highways during the past few years, and those "gentlemen of the road" were at once brought to trial.

As on former occasions, when the Vigilante trials were held in Central City, Judge Wolf was appointed judge, by acclamation, and all necessary witnesses were at once summoned and the prisoners brought before their accusers—Langrish's Theater being temporarily transformed into a court of justice.

Of course one and all of the Knights pleaded "not guilty," but then there were Dead Shot and half a dozen witnesses to swear that they had taken them with arms in their hands, red masks on their faces, and knew them to be road-agents belonging to the band of Captain Satan.

In his quiet way Dead Shot told that he had a grievance to wipe out against Captain Satan and some of his men, and had sworn to hunt the whole band down to their death.

To do this he had thoroughly disguised himself as a miner, and, under the name of California Kit, had joined the Knights, professing to be a fugitive from justice.

Pretending to be a half-witted fellow he had escaped going with them on their raids, and had been given duties to perform about the Castle of Rocks, and during his stay there, had learned the history of the principal members of the band, and laid his plans for capturing or destroying them.

Having perfected his arrangements he left the band, and soon after came to Central City.

How he had succeeded the court were to judge; but he could swear personally against every prisoner then before them, as being a Knight.

The statement of Dead Shot created the greatest excitement, and the prisoners scowled at him savagely, but he seemed wholly indifferent to the admiration of the crowd or the hatred of the Knights, and having given his testimony quietly stepped aside.

With such testimony as was given by the Gold Bullet Sport, and corroborated by Buckskin Ben, Dick of Denver, and the other captors of the Knights, there was little use of wasting time.

The court made an effort to induce the prisoners to confess regarding their chief, but they either could not, or would not, even when offered their lives to betray him.

Then the Knights were condemned, in an impressive manner by Judge Wolf, to be immediately led forth to execution—to be hung upon a large tree growing upon the banks of Clear creek, just outside of the town.

At once the court adjourned to the place of execution, and Slim Ike and Buckskin Ben were appointed executioners, and went to work with a will, while the crowd stood in silent expectation, and the doomed Knights in dogged despair.

"Your testimony was overwhelming, Mr. Tarleton; but do you think you will ever catch Captain Satan?"

It was Carl Kenyon who spoke, and he addressed Dead Shot, as the two stood together, near Judge Wolf and the jury.

"I am confident I will, sir, for he has not left the country."

"He is a most remarkable man, Mr. Tarleton—given to a number of disguises, I hear, and may be at this moment in the crowd calmly looking on at the hanging of his men."

The speaker was Major Melton, who, at that moment, joined them, and heard the question of Carl Kenyon and the reply of Dead Shot.

"True, Major Melton; but I shall make a strong effort to find him. There, the word is given!"

As the Gold Bullet Sport spoke, the wagon was driven ahead, upon which the doomed men were standing, their necks encircled by the ropes, and they at once swung from life into death, while a great shout went up from the rough crowd.

With pale face Dead Shot turned away, walked back to the hotel, mounted his horse and rode out of town.

Five minutes after, the Red Snake, also mounted, followed him.

Near the cabin of Calamity Kate the Indian overtook the Gold Bullet Sport and the two rode on together, until they came to the cabin of Colonel Darke, in front of which was the same man that Tarleton had before seen.

"The colonel has not yet returned, I suppose?"

"No, boss. Got a letter from him yesterday by Dan Smith. He are still in Denver, an' he's got a touch o' fever—guesses yer gold pill didn't do him no benefit; but they is raisin' things in Central, I l'arns—is they?"

"Yes, they are making it interesting for all rascals. You and your master had better look out."

"I don't savey, boss."

Dead Shot made no reply, but rode on, leaving Colonel Darke's man-of-all-work gazing after him.

A short gallop and the two horsemen drew rein before the cabin of the boss-miner of "The Grizzly."

"Hello, pard, white an' red, how kin I serve yer?" and Frisco Frank came forth, his eyes keenly searching the faces of his unexpected visitors, both of whom he knew by sight, as he had been in the X. 10. U. 8. Saloon the night of Red Snake's game of cards with the Angel Quartette.

"Move a muscle, Frisco Frank, and you are a dead man."

There was no mistaking the tone—there was no mistaking the act! Dead Shot covered the miner's heart with his gold-mounted revolver, and Frisco Frank was likely to find gold where he least desired it.

"I say, pard, what are I done ter you, the yer chip in thusly?" whined the miner.

Dead Shot spoke to Red Snake in Cheyenne; the Indian sprung from his horse, and with a lariat had the miner securely bound in a twinkling.

"Now I will answer you; which do you love best, your life or master?"

"I don't rattle with yer idee," sullenly replied the man.

Dead Shot took out his watch and looked at it.

"You have just one minute to answer my question."

There was no trifling with the man before him, and Frisco Frank knew it.

"I loves my life best; but I hain't no master—these are a free kentry."

"Any villain you serve for gold is your master; but we will not argue that point, for I have more important questions to ask you. Answer them and I will give you your life and let you go, so that you leave this country at once; refuse, and I will send one of my gold bullets through your brain."

"I'm answerin' questions every time, pard," was the quick reply.

Dead Shot sat down in front of the miner and asked:

"What did your master do with a horseman he captured on the mountains, some days ago?"

"Who, pard?" asked Frisco Frank, as though to see how much his questioner knew.

"The former manager of the Grizzly Mine—Carleton Keene, he called himself."

"Guesses as how you knows it all. He are bagged over yonder in the canyon."

"You can lead me there, I suppose?"

"I dunno as I kin."

Dead Shot quietly put the muzzle of his pistol against the man's ear, and he added, quickly:

"I mout be persuaded."

"So I think. Is Carleton Keene alive?"

"Life's too onsart'in, pard, fer me ter venture a remark. I guesses he mout be, though."

"Get up, and show me the way."

The man silently obeyed, and at last the two reached the secret cave, the Indian remaining with the horses in the canyon.

The man was alive—pale, haggard, emaciated and suffering the pangs of starvation.

"You have come to save me?" he said, eagerly.

"I have," and he unlocked the irons from the poor fellow.

"Now, Frisco Frank, you shall take this gen-

tleman's place until I need you, and he shall be your guard—come."

The miner attempted to resist, but with an effort of his giant strength the Gold Bullet Sport hurled him to the ground, and in an instant he was ironed, hands and feet.

"Here, sir, take a swallow of this," and Dead Shot handed a flask to Carleton Keene, who seemed greatly strengthened by the draught.

"Now, Mr. Keene, I will leave you here to watch this man, and my Indian friend will bring you provisions and arms. I may need you both to-night. Are you able to stand guard?"

"Oh, yes; I feel like another man; but, who are you, for there is something strangely familiar in your face?"

"Men call me Dead Shot the Gold Bullet Sport. Be careful not to leave this cave," and Tarleton walked away, and mounting his horse soon returned to the cabin, where he procured some food, blankets, and the weapons of Frisco Frank, and gave them to the Red Snake.

"Take them to the cave and give them to the one that was a prisoner; then come to Major Melton's, where I will be," he said, and putting spurs to his horse he dashed away, and again drew rein at the cabin of Colonel Darke.

"Pardner, yer is social," said the man in charge of the cabin.

"Yes, and I intend to be more so. What is your name—that is, what name are you now dodging the law under?"

"My name are U. B. Damn."

"Well, Mr. U. B. Damn, you are likely to be done with as your name suggests. I have the drop on you!"

"Oh, Lordy! How hes I run ag'in' yer, pardner?" and U. B. Damn became very pale.

"That you shall soon know. At present I must place you where you can be found when wanted. Hold out your hands, sir!"

It was useless to resist, and with a muttered oath the man obeyed and Dead Shot slipped a pair of handcuffs upon his wrists.

Then he led him into the cabin, and with a horse-hair lariat, found there, bound his feet, and with the end of a blanket gagged him.

"Now you can rest easy until I send for you," and closing and locking the door upon the man with the profane appellation the Gold Bullet Sport again mounted his steed and rode rapidly back to town, a strange expression resting upon his handsome, sad face.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TREBLY UNMASKED.

MAJOR MELTON, his daughter and Carl Kenyon sat in the pleasant sitting-room of the Melton home, the two gentlemen having returned together from the execution of the Knights.

The subject of discussion was an interesting one, for upon the morrow Major Melton was to take full control of the Grizzly Mine, and Carl Kenyon was urging that, as important business matters would call him away from Central City for an indefinite period, that Florence should at once become his wife.

The more that the maiden saw of her lover the more she regretted her act in promising to marry him; but, then, she loved her father, and for his sake was willing to sacrifice herself. Now, having decided, she was perfectly willing to become Mrs. Kenyon without longer delay, and had given an indifferent consent to that effect when a step was heard upon the piazza, and the maid-of-all-work at the cottage came in to say that a gentleman wished to see the master.

Going to the door Major Melton beheld Dead Shot, pale, stern and quiet.

"Why, my dear Tarleton, come in! I am glad to see you."

"No, major, not until I have had a word with you. Have you seen enough of me to have perfect confidence in me?"

There was something in Dead Shot's manner that impressed Major Melton and he replied at once:

"Indeed I have—the utmost."

"Thank you. Now you return to your guest, and in a short while I will call again; then, whatever I say, suggest or do, I wish you to uphold me in. It is a strange request, sir, but I am acting wholly for your good, and that of your daughter. If I go wrong I am personally responsible to you, sir."

"Tarleton, there is some strange reason for this request, but I will do as you wish, for I know enough of you to feel that you are not a man to act for effect."

"I will return within ten minutes, for I do not wish it to seem as though I had spoken to you," and Dead Shot turned away, while the major re-entered the sitting-room.

After a turn around the garden for a quarter of an hour, there came another knock at the door, and the servant ushered in Mr. Tarleton.

A flush came upon the face of Florence, but she greeted him warmly, while Carl Kenyon scowled, and the major was most gracious.

For a few moments the conversation was on general topics, and the major, feeling that the visit of Dead Shot had something to do with Florence and Carl Kenyon, said quietly:

"As a friend of ours, Tarleton, I will inform you of a secret: my daughter is to become Mrs. Kenyon to-morrow evening."

All saw the Gold Bullet Sport start, and his face pale; but he said, very pleasantly:

"Indeed! Mr. Kenyon is to be warmly congratulated. By the way, Mr. Kenyon, your good fortune is such that I would like to stake my life against the lady's hand, and settle it with a game of cards."

Florence flushed with indignation, and glanced toward her father, as though to resent the insult; but the look she saw on his face caused her to feel that Dead Shot was playing a part, for some reason, and her desire to escape the hated alliance with Carl Kenyon was such that she was most willing to be aided.

"Sir, do I understand that I am to offer my affiancée's hand against that of a sport, a gambler, and one whose hands are dyed red with human blood?" savagely said Carl Kenyon.

Dead Shot was now all smiles, and replied:

"Yes, that is just what you did understand me to say: I will stake my life, in a game of cards, against your right to claim the hand of Miss Melton. If I lose, why, you have my life whenever you choose to take it; if you lose, then I claim Miss Melton," and Dead Shot glanced around as though he had made a most delightful proposition, while Carl Kenyon seemed dumb with amazement.

"That is fair, Kenyon, and Tarleton certainly offers his life against Florence's hand; what say you, my daughter?"

"I say, father, as preposterous as the whole affair seems, I am interested enough to wish to see the game played, and I will accept the alternative, as far as I am concerned."

Florence Melton was now very pale: she felt confident that her suspicions regarding the conduct of Dead Shot were correct; and come what might, she would be in no worse position than she then was, while she would take good care, if in her power, that Carl Kenyon should not injure the Gold Bullet Sport.

"This is shameful, and I confess my intense surprise, Major Melton, that this man is not at once kicked out of the door."

Tarleton smiled, and the major replied:

"On the contrary, Kenyon, I am anxious to see this game played to the end. Come, the majority are against you."

"And if I refuse, Major Melton?"

"Then, Mr. Kenyon, you and I will play a game of a different kind the minute you leave the shelter of this roof."

The Gold Bullet Sport spoke calmly, but Carl Kenyon felt that he was in deadly earnest, and with a light laugh, which he was far from feeling, he replied:

"So be it, if the majority is against me. When shall we play, Mr. Tarleton?"

"Now; the major doubtless has a pack of cards."

"I have a pack myself, and—"

"I prefer to use those the major will furnish," and Dead Shot took a fresh pack handed him by his host.

"Best three in five, or one game to decide—whichever you please, sir," said Dead Shot.

Carl Kenyon wanted the agony over with—he dreaded lest the Gold Bullet Sport was entangling him in toils from which it would be a hard matter to escape, and he said shortly:

"One game let it be!"

Dead Shot bowed, sat down at the table, and Carl Kenyon took his seat opposite, while Florence and her father stood, one upon either side.

The two men cut for deal and Dead Shot won, and carefully and slowly shuffled the cards, and dealt out the hands; then each took up his hand.

Dead Shot, though pale, wore that quiet, mysterious smile, habitual to him when deeply moved; but he showed no tremor of a nerve, though his life was at stake, and he knew, if he lost, that the man before him would not hesitate to claim his winnings.

Carl Kenyon was white, and there was just the slightest nervousness in his manner—brought on by ignorance of what all this meant.

Slowly the game progressed, and—Dead Shot won.

"Curses on my ill fortune! but, gambler, you are a fool if you think I shall relinquish my claim upon the hand of Florence Melton because you have been more lucky in a game of cards," angrily said Carl Kenyon.

"Pardon me, Mr. Kenyon, but as an interested party, I beg to say that my hand has been won by Mr. Tarleton fairly, and our engagement ends, sir," and Florence turned haughtily toward her lover.

"Major Melton, I appeal to you, sir—this is the veriest nonsense."

"Mr. Tarleton, sir, must be the judge, as he played the game in good faith, staking his life against the hand of my daughter; had he lost, it would have been a sad matter for him," said the major.

"Do you think I should have claimed his life?"

"Yes, Carl Kenyon, you would have claimed it with a joy it were hard to conceal. Hold on, sir! Now that you are no longer engaged to Miss Melton—now that she is wholly free from you, I here declare you to be, not Carl Kenyon, but Colonel Darke, from whom I won the Deadman's Mine."

"It is a lie!" shrieked the man, savagely, dropping his hand upon his revolver.

"Hands off, sir! You are covered by one who will kill you if you draw a weapon."

The Gold Bullet Sport spoke calmly, yet his own hands held no revolver, and the three glanced around the room to see from whence came the danger threatened.

There, in the window behind the denounced man, stood the Red Snake, his rifle to his shoulder, his finger on the trigger!

A bitter curse escaped the shut teeth of Carl Kenyon, and then he broke out with:

"Major Melton, will you allow this insult in your own house?"

"If Mr. Tarleton cannot prove his words, sir he is personally responsible to me. If he does prove them, then I shall hold you responsible for the insult to my daughter and myself."

"Major Melton, I can prove what I say; and more—this man is none other than Captain S. *Chief of the Knights of the Overland.*"

As Dead Shot spoke he sprung forward and seized both hands of the man in a grasp of iron, and there was heard the click, click, of metal, as handcuffs were clasped upon his wrists, while Florence staggered back and fell, almost fainting, into a chair.

As for Major Melton, he stood like one in sleep; and the voice of Dead Shot again speaking was a relief.

"Major Melton, if you will make yourself responsible for this prisoner, and permit me to ask to your house certain persons, I will prove all that I say regarding this man."

"Certainly, Tarleton; do as you please in this matter. I have perfect confidence in you. Oh, God! from what have you not saved me and my child!" and the major led Florence from the room.

A moment after he returned, and found that Dead Shot had also ironed the prisoner's ankles, and that Red Snake had entered the room.

Turning to the Indian, the Gold Bullet Sport handed him a key and said a few words to him in the Cheyenne tongue, and Red Snake quickly left the house.

"Now, major, I am going to leave this gentleman in your charge, while I go after several persons whom I desire to have present. I will return within half an hour," and leaving the house Dead Shot mounted his horse and rode rapidly into town.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE GOLD BULLET SPORT'S REVELATION.

IN an hour's time after the denunciation of the man who called himself Carl Kenyon a number of persons were gathered in the room of the Melton cottage.

In one corner of the room, with the Indian by his side as a guard, sat the prisoner, his face livid, his teeth set, and near by were Dick of Denver, Bucksin Ben and Slim Ike, and between them, also prisoners, were the men known as Frisco, Frank, U. B. Damn and Carleton Keene.

At a little table in front of these stood Dead Shot the Gold Bullet Sport—calm, pale, and with a livid light burning in his eyes.

Within the room, and seemingly an audience, were Major Melton and Florence, Calamity Kate and Judge Wolf, Hugh Lambert and his wife, and Violet Markham and Lalulah.

All eyes were turned upon Dead Shot, as, in his deep tones, he said:

"With the permission of Major Melton I asked you all here that the prisoner yonder might be known in his true character, and all present, excepting his guards, are interested personally in the revelation I have to make."

"For two years I have been performing a solemn duty, and that is trailing that man to his doom by day and by night."

"In the performance of that duty I have worn as many disguises as he has, and day by day had entwined around him a coil of proof as to his villainy that is irresistible."

"I now accuse that man of having impersonated Carl Kenyon, and the one who rightly bears that name sits there—having been known in this community as Carleton Keene, the manager of the Grizzly Mine. I accuse that man of being the person known as Colonel Darke, and here are his disguises as such, and upon his ear is my mark, now covered over with flesh-colored court-plaster," and Dead Shot held up to view a false beard and wig, and stepping alongside the prisoner raised a lock of hair hanging over the left ear, and revealed a round wound there, the size of a bullet.

"I accuse that man of being Captain Satan, the chief of the Knights of the Overland, and in this bundle are the disguises he has worn as that human monster, and his red mask, that concealed even his disguised face."

"I accuse that man of being my worst foe—"

"In the devil's name, who are you?" yelled the prisoner, his eyes glaring, his form trembling.

"Men call me here Tarleton and Dead Shot the Gold Bullet Sport; my real name is Harold Tarleton Meredith," was the stern response.

"It is a lie—he is dead—I saw him die," cried the prisoner.

"You mistake; he is not dead, as you shall know—as all shall know who hear my story."

"Ten years ago, a country boy, I visited Boston to get a situation by which to aid in the sup-

port of my parents, who lived upon a small farm in the Kennebec valley of Maine.

"Fortune favored me, for the day of my arrival in town I saved the lives of a gentleman and his daughter, whose horses had run away with them and dashed off of a pier, in their fright, into the water.

"I rescued the little girl, and then her father; the result of which was that I obtained a situation as clerk in the banking-house of the gentleman whose life I had saved—am I telling the truth Carl Kenyon?" and Dead Shot turned to the man heretofore known as Carleton Keene.

"You are," was the reply, in a trembling voice.

"Also employed in the banking-house were a nephew of the banker, and a distant relative—there sits the nephew, in the prisoner, and this person is the distant relative," and Dead Shot referred to Carleton Keene.

"As I devoted myself wholly to business I was rapidly promoted, and soon became assistant cashier, and then commenced their hatred toward me, and it was further increased by my learning to love the daughter of my kind benefactor, though she was then a mere child.

"To hasten with my revelation, one night the banking-house was mysteriously robbed, and that man, the prisoner, reported having seen me come out of the door about midnight, and Carl Kenyon said that I had hinted to him to join me in a big speculation, and of course it brought suspicion on me; my room was searched, and the money, excepting a thousand dollars, was found hidden there!

"I was tried, and the proof against me being conclusive, I was sent to the State's prison for ten years; but wholly innocent, I plotted to make my escape, that I might prove before the world that I was the victim of a conspiracy.

"I was the more urged to this as the banker's daughter did not believe me guilty, and begged me to prove my innocence, and through her aid I made my escape.

"I came out of prison to find my old parents dead—they died of a broken heart at the supposed crime of their son; my benefactor, who had loved me as a son, was ill and not expected to live, and my treachery to him weighed heavily upon him.

"At length he died, and then came the crushing stroke; his nephew and kinsman were compelled to fly, for it was found that the bank had been systematically robbed for some time.

"I was in close concealment, but had no one to push my claims, and no money, so I determined to first seek a fortune in the gold-mines, or, failing in that, to find my two enemies, for to the gold-mines it was said they had gone.

"But I did not go alone. The daughter of my benefactor had refused the love of her cousin, to whose guardianship her dying father had left her, for he knew not his nephew's character, and she became my wife.

"We sought a home not very many miles from here, and I was fortunate in finding a good claim, and building me a cabin I went to work.

"Once it was my fortune to befriend an Indian chief—he sits there—and he, knowing my name, came to me with a story he had overheard: two men were talking together, and it was a plot to seek me out, for it was known that I was in Colorado, and killing me, one of them was to take my wife by force, to live with him.

"One of those men, Carl Kenyon, refused to enter into the diabolical plot, and the other, holding some secret power over him, drove him from his company, while he, with the gold he had dug from his claim, organized a band of four men besides himself, and began the search for me.

"One day, just before nightfall, he came to my cabin, accompanied by his four cut throats, and who were none other than those known as the Angel Quartette in Central City—the original Queen, Ace, Jack and King, as they were known, and whom most of you present know to have fallen by my hand.

"Coming to my cabin with the avowed intention of taking my life, and dragging my wife down to shame, was it a wonder that I would rather see her die than fall into the power of that man?

"I was taken unawares, and, feeling that I was to die, for I was sorely wounded, I drove my knife into the heart of my beautiful wife, rather than see her fall into the hands of her wicked cousin, and with her consent."

A murmur of horror here went round the room; but Dead Shot went on:

"She died in my arms, and, sorely wounded as I was, that man, Clarence Gilmore, and his men hung me in mid-air to die, my eyes upon the form of my dead Victorine."

"But one person came suddenly upon the scene, and unable to cope single-handed with the five men, he gave several weird cries, which drove the murderer in affright from the spot, leaving me hanging, and, as they believed, dead.

"My preserver was the Indian there, Red Snake, the Cheyenne chief, who, cutting me down, when life was almost extinct, devoted himself to my recovery, and with wonderful skill saved me from death.

"My murdered wife—and Clarence Gilmore there is her murderer, and not myself—the noble

Indian buried near my cabin, and then, for four long months nursed me by night and day until I arose from my bed a well man.

"Then my heart was filled with revenge most bitter against Clarence Gilmore, and I set to work to enable me to cope with him.

"All day long I schooled myself to bear hardship, trained my muscles until they became like iron, and practiced with rifle, revolver and knife until I knew not what it was to make a poor shot, or to miss a target in knife-throwing, and the Cheyenne trained himself with me, whenever he could leave his people.

"Then I set out in search of Clarence Gilmore, and discovered that he had leagued himself with the road-agents, and become their chief, organizing a band known as the Knights of the Overland.

"In the disguise of a miner, and known as California Kit, I spent months in the band, and possessed myself with the recent history of its members as well as I could.

"I also found out that Carl Kenyon had been compelled to act as he did toward me by the power held over him by Clarence Gilmore, and, to hide from his old companion in guilt, he had assumed the name of Carlton Keene.

"How I have revenged myself upon the men who accompanied Clarence Gilmore to my cabin, and forced me to slay my poor wife, and how I have run down the Knights of the Overland, you all know, as you now do that I hold in my power the arch-fiend of all—the man who sits there.

"Now, Carl Kenyon, I ask you whether I was guilty of robbing my noble benefactor?"

"You were not! Clarence Gilmore robbed the bank and forced me to place the money in your room, and we divided the thousand dollars between us," was the quick and firm reply of Carl Kenyon.

"Then you will sign this paper to that effect, addressed to the Judge of the Court that tried me, and the present Governor of Massachusetts," and Dead Shot placed before him upon the table, a written document which Carl Kenyon at once signed.

"Now, Mr. Kenyon, I want you to tell those present how Clarence Gilmore made you a prisoner, and, asuming your name, attempted to defraud Major Melton out of his purchase of the Grizzly Mine, and drew your one hundred thousand dollars out of the bank in Denver."

In a few words Carl Kenyon told all.

"Now make known how he endeavored to get possession of Major Melton's claim, heretofore considered worthless, by making Miss Melton his wife."

Carl Kenyon obeyed, the horror-stricken auditors breathless with amazement, and Major Melton and Florence as white as the dead.

"I thank you, sir; your money is in the cabin occupied by Clarence Gilmore, under his name of Colonel Darke. When you get it, leave this country, and never again cross my path," and then Dead Shot turned to Frisco Frank:

"Now, sir, who is that man?"

"It are Capt'in Satan, Colonel Darke, Carl Kenyon, an' yer has another name yer giv'n him."

"And who are you, sir?"

"My name are Frisco Frank—I are a member o' the Knights o' the Overland; but I has bin on secret service fer the capt'in."

"Well, Frisco Frank, I spare you on account of your testimony against your master. When this trial is over you had better emigrate, and if I meet you again, I give you fair warning—I shall kill you."

"Nough said, pard; yer isn't goin' ter see me ag'in soon."

"Now, U. B. Damn, who is that man?"

"Thet are Capt'in Satan—known as Colonel Darke, an' I are one o' his gang o' Knights, what has been livin' in the cabin near the Deadman's Mine, an' I guesses as how I'd like ter become a levantin' pilgrim along with Frisco Frank, heur," replied the gentleman with the profane appellation with alacrity.

"You can go with Frisco Frank when I have done with you, and I give you the same warning I did him, and half an hour for you both to get out of Central City and immediate vicinity."

"I guesses as how we kin do it in less time, pard," said Frisco Frank; but Dead Shot turned to Lalulah, the Indian girl:

"Will the May Bird tell me if she knows this man?"

"Yes, he is Captain Satan. He has been known in many other characters, and I hate him now as deeply as I once loved him," was the quick and earnest reply.

"Now, Clarence Gilmore, I will again tell you that my name is Harold Tarleton Meredith, and my wife was Victorine Woodbridge."

"Victorine Woodbridge! Oh, God! It is as my heart has told me—she, and these two are my children."

It was Calamity Kate that spoke, and she turned with longing eyes toward Kate Markham and Vivian Lambert.

"Yes, my wife, Victorine, and these two ladies, are your children—the three born at a birth, and their father was Walter Woodbridge, a banker of Boston," said Harold Meredith, in his deep tones, which now trembled visibly.

Kind reader, pen of mine is inadequate to

portray the scene that followed—the guilty mother brought face to face with her children, both of whom forgave her in their loving hearts; to portray how quickly Frisco Frank and U. B. Damn "levanted" when given permission, and how Buckskin Ben and Slim Ike chattered like magpies over the happy *denouement*, and Dick of Denver offered his congratulations to all, while the Indian chief stood like a statue, a smile upon his bronze face and a glad light in his dark eyes, and Carl Kenyon, with downcast eyes, sat as though in deep shame at the part he had played, and Clarence Gilmore, his face black with passion, his eyes sunken and glaring, his teeth gritting savagely, scowled upon all present, and especially upon the man who had tracked him to doom.

No, my pen cannot write of that scene more

CONCLUSION.

Three scenes, and my story is ended.

Across a grave in a quiet valley stand two men, both armed—their pistols almost touching each other's heart—their eyes looking into each other's face.

A few paces distant is a small group—Major Melton, Judge Wolf, Hugh Lambert, Buckskin Ben, Dick of Denver, Slim Ike, Dan Smith and Red Snake—all gazing at the two men in silence.

One of those two is speaking—it is he who has won the name of the Gold Bullet Sport:

"Clarence Gilmore, so certain have I been that Fate decreed me to punish you that I risked my life in a game of cards against the Deadman's Mine, and won; again I risked my life against your claim to the hand of Miss Melton, and won."

"Now, across the grave of my murdered wife, I again risk my life, for I might hang you to the very tree where you had me hung, and without danger to myself; but, no; I again dare Fate. One of these pistols is loaded with a *gold bullet*, the other with powder only. Which is the fatal weapon neither of us know, and our chances are equal.

"If I fall you are free to go where you please, for these gentlemen have pledged me to do you no harm.

"If you fall my revenge is complete."

"Major Melton, I am ready."

"And I," said Clarence Gilmore, as pallid as a corpse.

In ringing tones Major Melton called out:

"One! two! three! Fire!"

With the last word both pistols flashed—and Clarence Gilmore fell dead.

Two persons stood on the piazza of the Melton cottage, a month after the death of Clarence Gilmore; they were Harold Meredith and Florence Melton.

"Florence, you know me as I am—you know how red my hands are dyed with human blood—and yet I come to you to ask if you will be my wife?"

"Yes, and in my love you shall forget the imbibed past."

"God bless you, Florence! When will you become my wife?"

"In one month Violet is to be made my sweet step-mother, Harold, and it shall be a double wedding, if you say so."

Kind reader, it was a *triple* wedding, for the night that made Violet Markham Mrs. Major Melton, and Florence Melton Mrs. Harold T. Meredith, Lalulah, the May Bird, became Mrs. Dick of Denver; that festive young sport, that strange compound of much that was good, and all that was reckless, had won the heart of the bronze beauty of the Cheyennes.

From that day Central City became of more importance, for much money was laid out by Harold Meredith, Major Melton and Hugh Lambert in working their rich mines, and three handsome residences were built in the suburbs of the town, and Mrs. Woodbridge, no longer known as Calamity Kate, passed her days in calm contentment in visiting from one to the other, for at all she was heartily welcome, the dark page in her life having been forgiven, if not forgotten.

As managers of the Melton, Meredith and Lambert mines, Buckskin Ben, Dick of Denver, and Slim Ike excel, and Red Snake, the Cheyenne, passes days in hunting game in the mountains and supplying the tables of his friends, for he is the best sportsman in Colorado.

As for Red Turner he found himself rich, as increase of patronage poured into the X. 10. U. 8. Saloon, and giving up dispensing "benzine" and "pizen," rented the Langrish Theater and engaged the famous John Dillon as comedian making thereby a good thing for both Dillon and Turner.

Dan Smith, the "Prince of the Ribbons," continued to rattle over the Denver road for years, bringing "pilgrims" to the Central City House, and its worthy proprietor, Judge Wolf, who, every Sunday, goes to dinner with one or the other of his friends: but never does the garrulous Dan pass the scene of his adventure with the Knights of the Overland, that he does not "go slow" and tell the story of how Captain Satan was hunted down by Dead Shot, the Gold Bullet Sport.

THE END.

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